

➔ **SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY** BIG PREVIEW!

**COMPUTER**

The PC Gaming Authority

# GAMING WORLD



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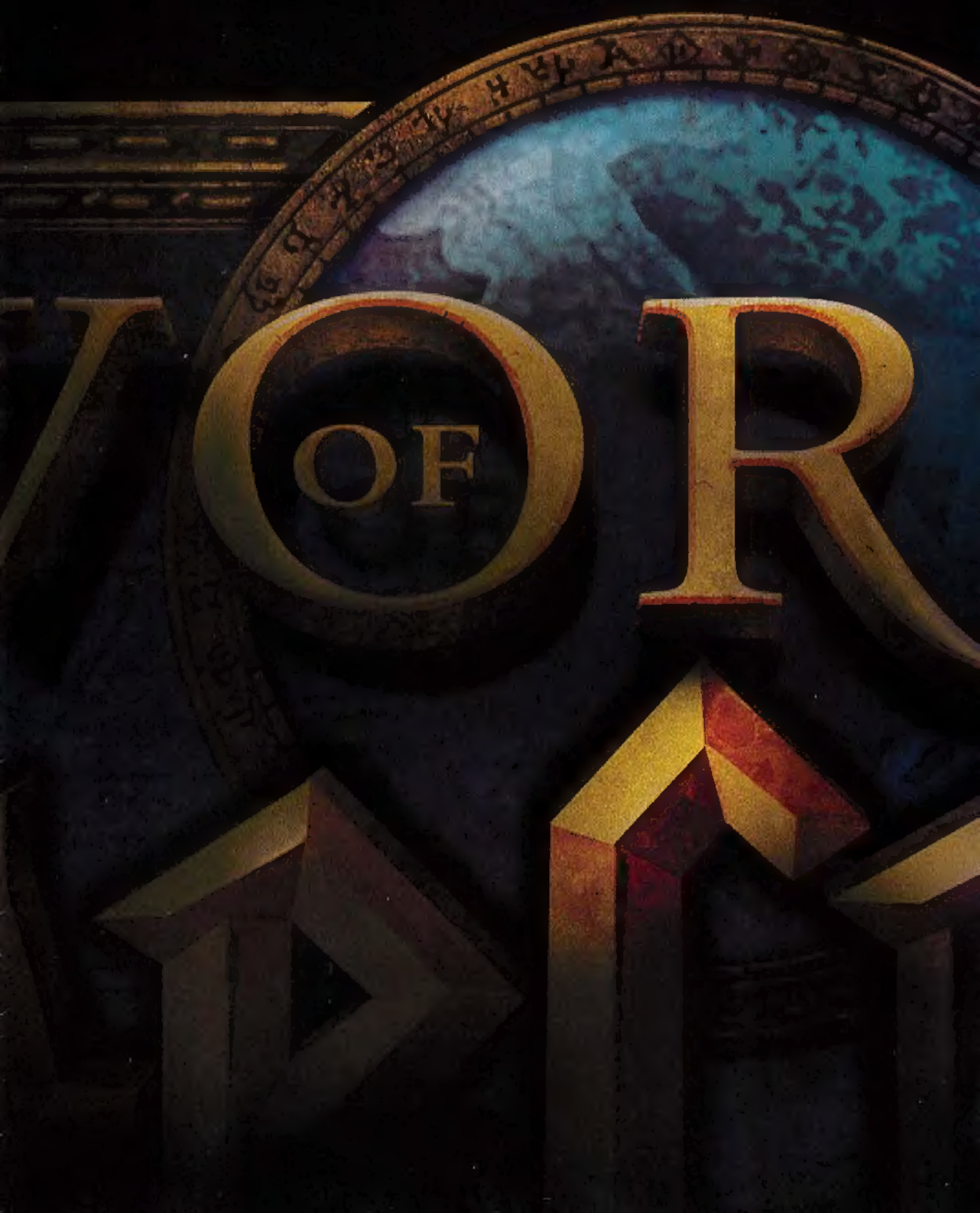
## WHAT IS THE MATRIX ONLINE?

➔ **WARNER BROS.** GAMBLES BIG WITH ITS HIT MOVIE FRANCHISE

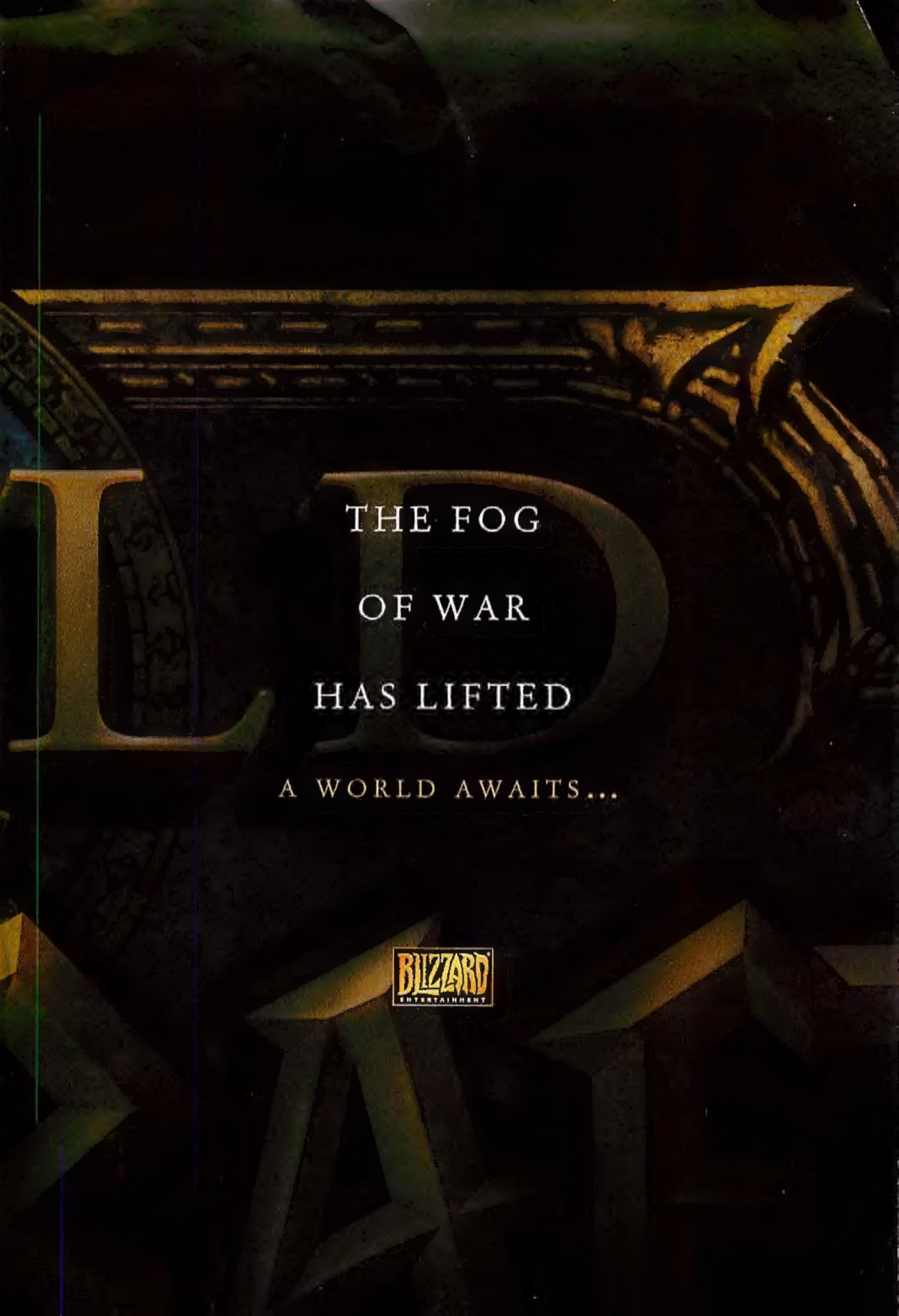
ALSO INSIDE:

## 102 FREE GAMES

OUR ANNUAL GUIDE TO THE BEST  
FREE GAMES ON THE WEB







W

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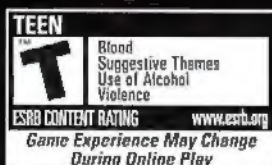


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Electronic Gaming Monthly

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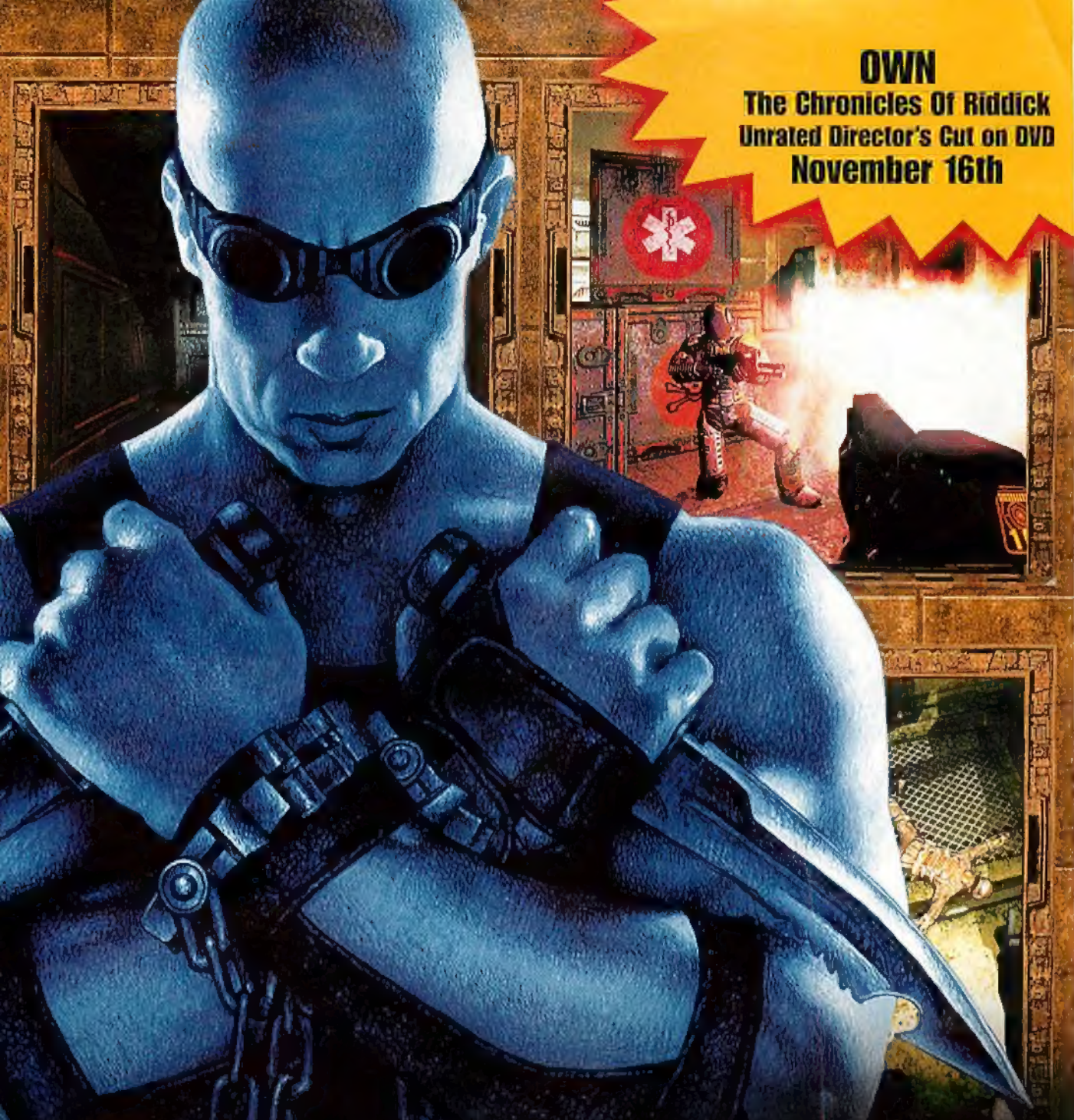


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Parental Advisory: A Note to Parents: The original motion picture The Chronicles of Riddick is rated PG-13. Please consult [www.filmratings.com](http://www.filmratings.com) for information regarding movie ratings in making viewing choices for children.

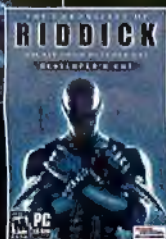


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JANUARY 2009 ISSUE #24

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Either Jeff loves **The Matrix**, or he just has a crush on Keanu. We're not sure which.

## 26 Letters

Good news, we haven't sunk low enough to send ourselves letters. But it could happen if you don't throw us a bone.

## 36 Radar

You knew the government was using games to train troops, but to train insurgents in bloodless revolution? How about a first-person shooter with no shooting? We saw lots of interesting stuff on display at the Serious Games Summit. Want to know what's new with Xfire? And there was also a competition where people from all over the world gathered in San Francisco for bragging rights—and big bucks! You'll see it all (and more) in this month's Radar.

## 48 Previews

Squeeze back into your sneaking outfit and night-vis on goggles. It's time for another stealth mission with **Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory**. We also got ate-breaking news and screens from the **Sims 2** expansion, as well as a look at Atari's D&D strategy game **Dragonshard**.



COVER STORY

## 102 FREE GAMES

Last holiday season, we gave the gift that kept on giving: a comprehensive list of the 101 coolest free games available on the Web. Of course, this year we've got to outdo ourselves by finding even more great freebies on the Web (102—get it?!!??). So flip ahead to see what we found. Then, go online and grab 'em all for yourself.



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It's official—there are more WWII games than living WWII veterans. And we've got 'em all: **D-Day**, **Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault**, **Pacific Fighters**, **Battles in Normandy**. While we wait for developers to branch out into something original, check out this month's crop of Vietnam games, **Men of Valor** and **Conflict: Vietnam**.



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## THE MATRIX

The movie trilogy is over, but the story lives on, as the Wachowskis take their mind (and spoon-) bending epic online. It's ambitious, it's a bit crazy, and it may defy expectations. Just like the movies.



# COMPUTER GAMING



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## 117 Check Out

A rig that's kinda an A-List worth the scribble, some strategies that are thrills... plus a picture of a cute girl from her IUP blog. See how good we are to you?

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Amer can McCee Presents: Another Pointless Rant



## THIS MONTH ON IUP.COM

### CGW.IUP.COM

What's new on IUP, you ask?

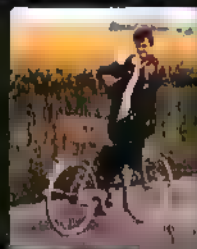
Just the usual junk metal contest and winners. Also updated is the tips section, including Doom



3 keyboard combinations and level cheats for Far Cry. After you're done cruising through those and some select parts of the magazine, drop on by the message boards, or join a club. Our personal favorite is still the Robert Coffey fan club, aka the Java Addicts.

### BECKERS21.IUP.COM

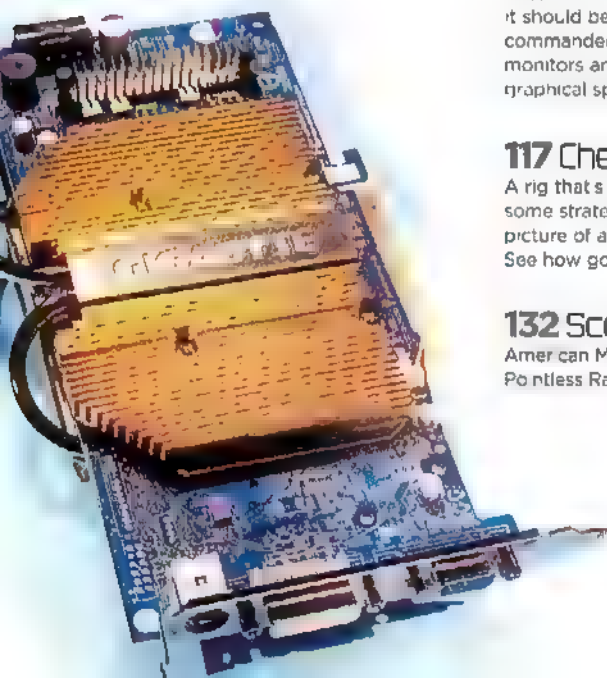
Between creating the CD and other weird jobs she's been saddled with, Rebecca claimed not to have five minutes to create a membership.




But we finally gave her the ultimatum. Now, with only one friend invite, she's feeling a tad lonely, so go cheer her up with a comment or two.

### BOARDS.IUP.COM

Ryan is our hero. He seized the initiative and made a fan club that's really taken off. Way to go! So, beloved readers, ignore the dorky name and go and post all the random stuff you wish at the "CGW Fans Unite" board. And hey, maybe if you throw us some good sound bites, we'll publish them.







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purged the earth  
of evil. I fear only  
sunlight and girls."

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| >2004 Game of the Year  |          |

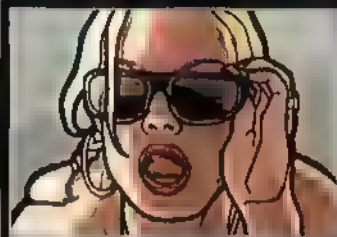
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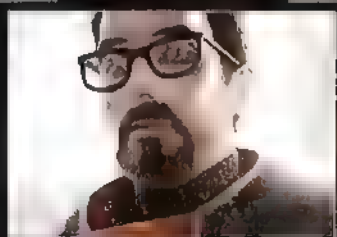
☒ >GTA San Andreas



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☒ >Halo 2



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# Taking the Red Pill

Or, How I Learned to Stop Hating *The Matrix*



Like many of the dorky fanboy nerds who waste their time on planet Earth obsessing over such trivialities as computer games, comic books, and science-fiction and fantasy books, I was enamored with the first *Matrix* movie. What's not to like? It's got a stoned mind-trip of a story line, awesome fight sequences, cool special effects, and Carrie-Anne Moss in shiny black leather. Five years later, it still holds up. The sequels? Well, that's another story. My only really fond memory of *The Matrix Reloaded*, which I saw the night it opened, was the moment right as the lights went out, when a female friend of mine—a prominent executive in the game industry—emitted perhaps the loudest burp I have ever heard, causing my hair to actually move due to the sheer sonic force of it and making the entire theater erupt in laughter. After that, it was all downhill, what with the excruciating rave sequence, the Architect, the Merovingian, and other incomprehensible oddities. I never even bothered to see the third movie.

So why is *The Matrix Online* on the cover of our magazine? Because of its potential. Because this is a universe that absolutely could and should work online. Because the talent behind this game—which includes Monolith Productions (*No One Lives Forever*, *Tron 2.0*), comic book author Paul Chadwick (who illustrated this month's CGW cover), and the Wachowski brothers themselves—is tremendous. And because the central conceit—to continue the official story line of the movies in an online game—is simply unprecedented.

Of course, there's no way to know whether *The Matrix Online* will ultimately rule or blow. But it's an ambitious, cool project from ambitious, cool people—and that's what cover stories are all about. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a spoon here that I'm trying to bend.

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



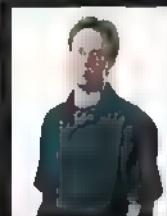
**KRISTEN SALVATORE**  
MANAGING EDITOR  
Just because baseball season is over doesn't mean that Kristen is pulling the bat away. No, the way the deadbeats around here keep missing their deadlines, quite a few cracked skulls are coming up in the edit staff's future. Yay!



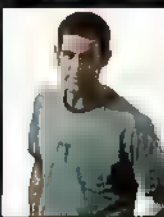
**ROBERT COFFEY**  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR  
Is he the angriest man in gaming, or merely the most misunderstood? If we just gave him a hug, would he write happy columns? So many questions, and the only one with the answers is... Satan!



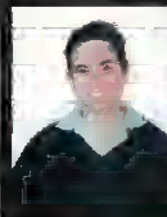
**DARREN GLADSTONE**  
SENIOR EDITOR  
Darren is so far ahead of the technology curve that he scrolls at the growing number of iPods around the office. Darren, it would seem, now downloads music straight into his head. Where the sound comes out, we don't wanna know.



**RYAN SCOTT**  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR  
Though he may look like the bastard love child of John Denver and Don Knotts, inside Ryan Scott beats the heart of a warrior. Not a real warrior. But, like, a D&D one with a really good melee attack bonus.



**MICHAEL JENNINGS**  
ART DIRECTOR  
Michael spent the bulk of this month interviewing executive art director candidates. Welcome to the world of middle management! Here's your red stapler! And hey, did you get the memo about those TPS reports?



**REBECCA GROSS**  
INTERN  
Our new intern is a mere 18 years old, which just goes to show you it's never too early to throw your resume. By the way, we'll have Rebecca reduced to a shadowy bulk of her former self, ready for a lifetime of self-leaching as a "professional game journalist."

## COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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WE CAPTURED THE SPIRIT,  
BUT DIDN'T TRY TO TAME IT.



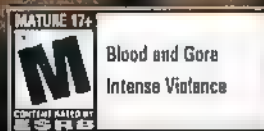
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PlayStation 2



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# Letters

Drinking isn't just for breakfast anymore

## There Is a "Me" in "Team"

In the days before fragboxes, I remember lugging my PC and big-assed 21-inch monitor over to a friend's house at 10 a.m. on a Saturday. Here, I found my bud Lee and 12 or so of our like-minded friends setting up an on-the-fly LAN and a game server loaded with every *Half-Life* map and mod we could find. By noon, everyone is in place and set up. Some of us have opened up our home-built rigs and are showing off the latest gizmo. The tech speak is thick but hey, this is what it is all about. Lunch is a memory as we check the supply of beer and sodas. The living room/dining room/family room area is packed with humming power waiting to be unleashed. The curtains are drawn, the phones unplugged. The first map is loading, and the mayhem is about to begin.

For the next eight to 12 hours, the sound of explosions and gunfire will fill this house along with whoops of triumph and the ever-present caustic remark from the latest honored dead. That feeling of ultimate cool is present as you nestle that 30-06 against your shoulder, scope-zoom that SOB who crossbow-sniped you five minutes ago, and put a round into his head as you yell out, "One shot, one KILL!!!" The four-letter words fly faster than the rockets. Deathmatch and teamplay for hours upon hours. Laughing and cursing till we are spent.

I will have these gaming memories with me till the day I die. I have found nothing like it from online gaming and never will. The camaraderie just isn't there. The immediacy just isn't there. The out and out FUN just isn't there. October's Scorched Earth was

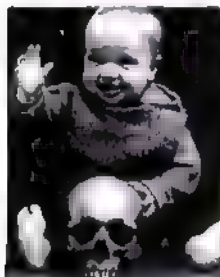
100 percent right. Keep it real, have a LAN party, and kick some serious butt in REAL real time.

Eric

Awww, Eric! You make us feel like kids again! Thanks!

## Irony Is So Ironical

I noticed in your response to uberCTian in your December 2004 letters column that you mentioned "Penny Arcade" was getting "too R-rated for a magazine like CGW." The facing page then contained a very provocative advertisement for *Playboy*. *The Mansion*. There was also the



## Nobody Wins With Sex and Violence

**T**he two *Playboy* ads in your last issue brought a few things to my mind. Are developers finally going to the lowest common denominator and combining porn and gaming? Have they really sunk that low? Of course, it's *Playboy*, so there's a lot more there than just porn. But you need to keep these things separate. When I'm gaming, sex needs to be the furthest thing from my mind, otherwise I lose concentration. Case in point: DON'T watch a Victoria's Secret fashion show while playing *Counter-Strike*. I lost so many times that eventually my teammates fragged me themselves. So please, for the sake of gaming, keep these two things separate.

Justin Yann

We couldn't agree more, Justin. In fact, we'd suggest that the inverse is true as well. We've lost count of how many sexual encounters we've had spoiled by engaging in congress during lamb slaughters. Sex and violence, violence and sex—nobody wins. Except the guy skinning the lambs. He does OK for himself.



inside flap of the same issue that contained another extremely risqué ad for the new *Leisure Suit Larry*. If those two ads aren't R-rated material or close enough to it, even with today's looser standards, I don't know what is. So, R-rated editorial content is out but R-rated advertisements are OK? I signed up to this magazine for games, not the next generation of interactive porn.

Ben

Hello, CGW! Longtime reader, first time writer. Anyway, I just had to comment on something I found in your December issue. In the letters section, you respond to uberCTian's concerns about the missing "Penny Arcade" with this: "We like the strip, too, but it was getting too R-rated for a magazine like CGW..." However, I couldn't help but notice the irony in the fact that not six inches from these very words is a full-page ad for *Playboy: The*

*Mansion* featuring a topless model with "PLAYBOY" strategically placed across her chest. While I found this hilarious, I thought you might want to inform your peon in charge of ad placement to be more careful in the future.

Bbexperience

We've said it before, we'll say it again: We have no control over the ads in the magazine; we just do all the typing that breaks them up. Be that as it may, while these products are indeed racy, the ads for them are suitable for a mainstream publication such as *CGW*, *Field & Stream*, or *Hustler*.

## Doom and Oblivion!

December's Scorched Earth was right on the nail! I work at a videogame store and every month I look forward to reading Robert's two cents—I sometimes even

Mail Bites

Tom vs. Bruce is one of the most refreshing pieces of gaming journalism to come along in a long time.

—Dennis

Does anyone else think it's funny that there's a *World of Warcraft* ad right in the middle of the EQ2 preview in the latest issue?

—Ted from accounting on 1UP.com

I wish all the vicious, baying *Doom 3* haters out there would just shut up and actually play the game.

—Chris Wittig



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skip right to it if no articles catch my attention. Now, I'm not going to overdo it here and go on and on about how much of a genius he might be. I'm sure lots of people will silently thank me for that. I'm just going to keep it short, sweet, and simple, 'cause that's the kinda guy I am, and that's what I like. Well maybe not "that" short...

The bottom line, Robert: KEEP RANTING, don't lose the fire, get pissed at EVERYTHING! You're doing one heck of a job of keeping the silent gaming community laughing their heads off at all the spoiled little bitches bickering on their message boards. We need you writing this column because it helps calm us down after looking at all the shiny new games coming our way. Now to make my way over to Kinko's—got to photocopy your article so I can hand it out as people come into my store.

That way, after witnessing your rage, mine won't look as bad.

Cephello

Robert Coffey is good. Scorched Earth in Issue 245 exploded my head all over the place. Thank you for finally speaking up and putting those idiots who put down popular games just because it seems cool to do so in their place. I've been waiting for someone to do that for years. Robert Coffey is good. Robert Coffey is just Long live Robert Coffey.

Mike Mozeleski



### You Are What You Eat

I am a longtime fan, having read your fine publication ever since my sixth grade teacher brought in copies so people could read something during homeroom, unwittingly causing

untold emotional damage to me and my fellow classmates. Anyway, as I was saying, I am a longtime reader, so I find it strange that the first time I write to you is on the subject of game meat. In your response to what is apparently a spam message, you casually dismissed the food as weird. While it is not the most conventional food out there, zebra, ostrich, gemsbok, and kudu all make very good steaks. On a recent camping trip to Namibia (a nation in southern Africa), we ate a lot of ostrich, and if through some freak occurrence you

are ever heading through Windhoek (the capital city of Namibia), you *must* stop by Joe's Bear House, which has some of the best food you will ever eat, including zebra steaks, which taste a lot like normal steaks, just a whole lot better. By the way, blesbok is a lightly purple-colored antelope (remember, wikipedia.org is your friend).

Anyway, keep up the good work.

Schuyler

We've said it before and we'll say it again: If it ain't McDonald's hamburger meat...it ain't meat.

### Two Dweebs Enter...

I was reading through a recent edition of CGW and noticed something about an intern in the letters section. I would take on the job and your current intern for a chance to be an intern for your magazine. PLEASE let me know what I would have to do for a chance to do so. I've spent most of my adult life in front of the computer (I'm 23, but only because they forced me to be), and I will be receiving a degree in communications and sociology from Bowling Green State University. If you could forward this to the appropriate people or let me know who I need to contact, I would be forever in your debt.

Vincent Staropoli



You got it, Vincent! But are you man enough to survive a thunderdome match with Rebecca? Are you? ARE YOU?!!!!

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### Dept. of Corrections

We erred in our December 2004 Logitech MX1000 Laser Mouse review when we lamented the lack of a utility to get the middle mouse button working in games. There is such a utility—however, it is so totally hidden in the program and so counterintuitive that we feel many users will have the same difficulty resetting the button that we did. Our four-star rating of this device remains unchanged.



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You guys should really  
respect console games  
more than you do.  
—Lewis Hligel

I love Jeff Green and would have  
his baby, except I'm too old for him,  
and, oh yeah, I'm a guy.  
—Robert Ingber





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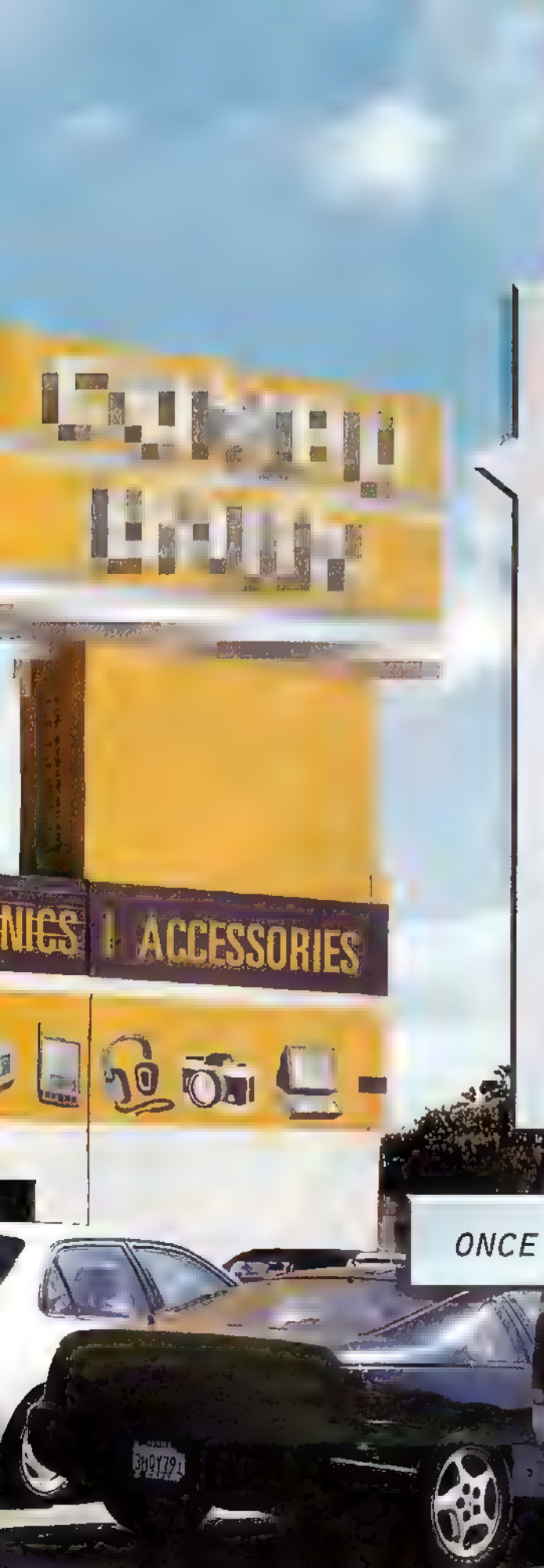
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# Radar

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■ SIMULATION NATION

## Uncle Sam Gets Serious

GAMES ARE GRADUATING—AND MILITARY  
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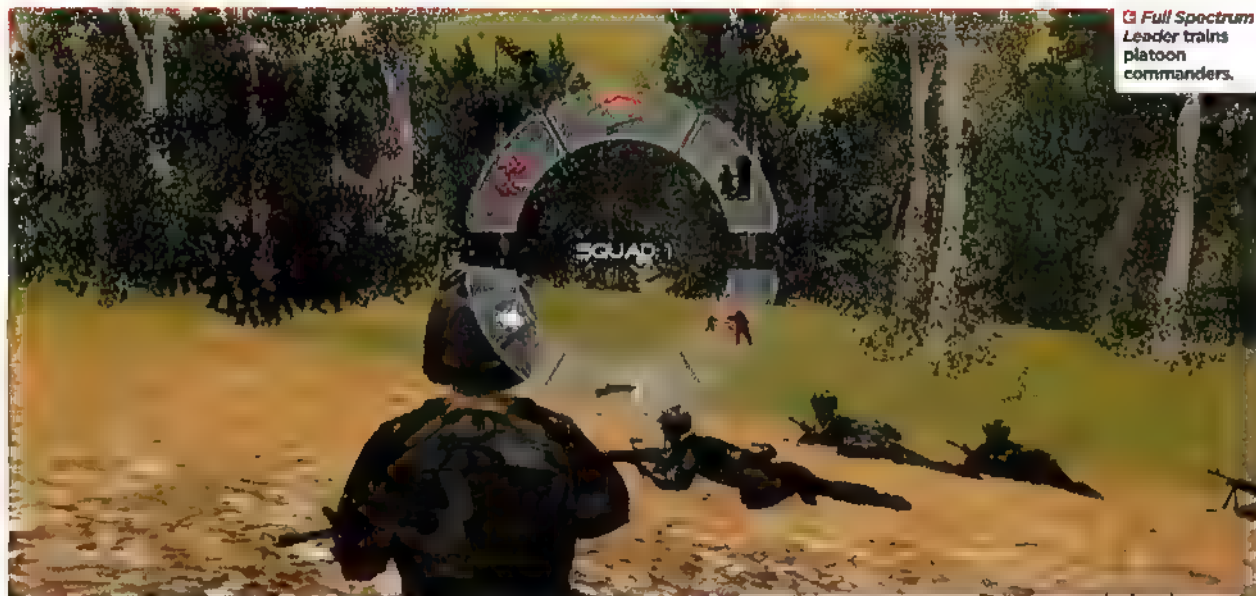
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**H**undreds of people in conservative suits mill around a musty convention hall in Washington, D.C. They're discussing the important games they're making—none of which you'll see in a store. Here at the Serious Games Summit, the hot topic of discussion is the future of gaming beyond combat training, and how it may well reach into social engineering and outright revolution. In other words, this is not the show floor at E3.

### Even Washington Changes

While speaking at the conference, Douglas Whatley, the CEO of developer BreakAway, noted that seven years ago, his company was kicked out of meetings with government officials because the word "game" was then in the company's name. One general even said, "I don't want any software in my project." So BreakAway removed the offending word. But as the ink was drying on the paperwork, government entities began approaching BreakAway with training contracts specifically because of the company's gaming experience.

Washington, despite its reputed conservatism, is changing. Games are no longer seen just as children's playthings or targets for moral crusades. They are increasingly considered effective ways to train people and implement policy.

In fact, there is mounting evidence that gaming can be far more effective than more traditional training methods. A recent study at Iowa State University found that doctors who played videogames before performing surgery reduced their "oops factor" by 37 percent and performed their tasks faster. However, scholars agree that more research needs to be done, and data is still limited. Such studies are "difficult to do, and

results are often ugly," according to Dr. Matthew Lewis, a RAND researcher.

### Not Just a Recruiting Tool

Though games like *America's Army* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* opened the door, the government gaming effort goes beyond combat training and recruiting. The Army is also making serious attempts to find noncombat uses for gaming, including cultural sensitivity training.

Ironically two cultural training projects presented at the conference use engines originally designed for shooters. *Tactical Language Learning System*, from a group based out of USC, uses the Unreal engine, while *Virtual Environment Cultural Training for Operational Readiness* from Chi-Systems uses the LithTech engine (*NOLF*, *TRON*). Both games are third-person shooters without guns, but instead of rocket launchers, gestures such as respectful bows are the games' weapons.

The games teach the player expressions of respect and areas of cultural sensitivity for certain Muslim cultures. *TLLS* even uses a speech-recognition system to teach the speaker key Arabic phrases. The designers hope that by using videogames they can engage "the videogame genera-



**The VECTOR training system** hopes to prevent cultural faux pas.

tion" that makes up the bulk of U.S. forces currently deployed abroad. Though both games focus on the Muslim world, the eventual goal is a plug-and-play mode, with a library of mods that will allow the Army to teach soldiers about any culture before they experience it in person.

### An Army of Peaceniks

Nongovernmental organizations are also getting in the game. The most interesting presentation at the conference was about BreakAway's *A Force More Powerful*, a project commissioned by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. Possibly a future *America's Army* for nonviolent struggles and is designed to train activists in the planning and tactics needed to bring about political change. Played out as a

**There is mounting evidence that gaming can be far more effective than more traditional training methods.**

turn-based strategy game, *AFMP* has a flexible engine that can model any regime in the world, and scenario goals range from stopping an unpopular war to freeing an imprisoned activist. The developers hope it can teach activists about the elements necessary for a successful nonviolent struggle.

"The client came to us partly out of frustration with activists who don't know the difference between strategy and tactics, with the consequence that planning meetings frequently digress and yield no consensus," notes designer Ananda Gupta. Once completed, *AFMP* will be freely distributed. Due to its digital nature, members of the ICNC believe that it can be smuggled into nations with repressive regimes, where cadres of activists can be trained to work more effectively toward their goals.

Despite the nonviolent theme, *AFMP* is neither completely idealistic nor entirely pacifistic. The designers realize that violence may result from any struggle. Still, they

maintain that nonviolence is the most effective way to put pressure on regimes to get them to do what you want. Distribution of *AFMP* could play a part in testing that belief in the real world.

### Wisdom from Chaos

Most of the Serious Games Summit's emphasis was on actual projects, but many participants were looking toward more ambitious goals.

"I think [gaming's] greatest potential for government lies in the evolution of [MMO] games, and...using such games to study emerging behavior and bring more collective 'smarts' to bear on the hard problems facing society, both domestically and globally," comments David Rejeski, director of the Foresight and Governance Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center Games, he believes, can be used for anything from teaching leaders how to manage



**AFMP** is like *Republic: The Revolution*—but hopefully fun.

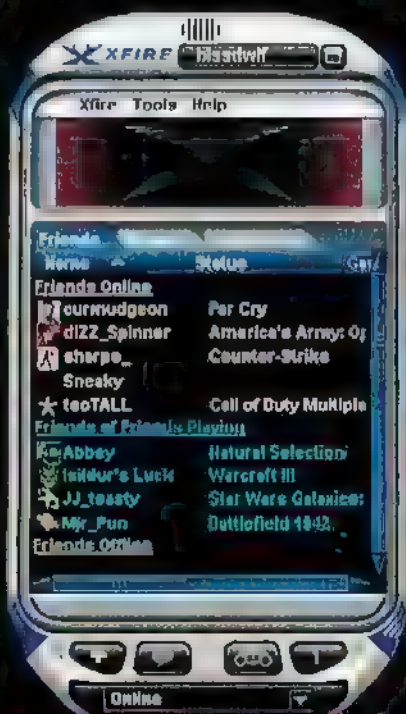
the chaos of national emergencies to finding solutions to the nation's budget deficit.

If he is correct, games may eventually become a tool for policy planning in high positions of power, rather than just a method of recruiting Army grunts. So the next time someone complains about your *City of Heroes* obsession, just tell him that you're thinking of America's future. **X** **DI LUO**

### THE GAMER'S NÄPSTER

# Caught in the Xfire

Gaming's instant messenger goes live



**F**inding a buddy to play games with online is no easy feat. That's why the concept behind Xfire is easy to get: Create an instant messenger for gamers. Since Xfire's early beta release last year, both the scope of the service and the number of users has grown.

"We've now got close to 600,000 users," crowds Xfire CEO Mike Cassidy. The quick growth is in no small part due to what the free service currently offers. First, there's the communication aspect of AIM. You can see all the games you and your friends have in common and then link up to chat and play online. Even midgame, you can hit Scroll Lock-X, and the Xfire chat window will pop up in most games. There's also the Friendster-like linking of you and friends of friends. But the newest, most intriguing part of the service is file sharing.

### Six degrees of gaming

With the release of Xfire version 1.0 comes a new way to distribute games. Xfire's BitTorrent-style peer-to-peer network will be all about sharing demos, video clips, patches, and even mods. These files will initially be seeded to Xfire's servers. As more

people download the programs, more computers will share the server load, so you'll be able to grab any program you need in a flash. "We just want to make everything easier for gamers—easier to find each other, and now easier to get all the files they really want," says Cassidy.

Since the system is so new, there are only a few things to download right now, but Cassidy already has big plans for the future. Xfire will distribute monthly game updates through a premium service. "Instead of publishers making one expansion a year and selling it for \$30, why not regularly release new content?" he asks. Cassidy has already confirmed that he is in talks with Activision, Electronic Arts, and Ubisoft about providing paid content for major franchises such as the *Rainbow Six* and *Battlefield* series. This interesting information comes hot on the heels of news that Valve's Steam service will operate in a similar fashion. "At this point, publishers are looking to explore every avenue to sell expansions and games with minimal overhead," says one industry analyst. "[Game publishers] would be dumb not to." While there are no details at press time, expect some major updates to the Xfire service in the coming year. **By Darren Gladstone**



NEWS  
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■ GOT GAME?

# Shots Heard 'round the World

The biggest gaming tournament in the world comes Stateside, and—surprise!—people actually show up

**U**irtual or not, staring down the barrel of a gun isn't fun. That's especially true when cash is on the line. At the recent World Cyber Games in San Francisco—the first time the event has been held outside of Korea—champion gamers from around the globe competed for world titles, international bragging rights, and hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash prizes. Dave Geffon of Team 3D, the *Counter-Strike* world champions, says of the experience: "It was intense."

## Coming to America

It's now fairly common knowledge that Koreans love to watch one another play PC games. In Korea, a jaunt around the prime time television spectrum will reveal numerous gaming tournaments broadcast on multiple networks. A regular "night out" for 20- and 30-somethings in Seoul involves nothing more than a trip to a cyber café and several hours of first-person shooting or real-time strategizing—pick your poison. It's no surprise, then, that competitive gaming is alive and well in Korea and has been for several years. With full sponsorship from Korean megacorporation Samsung, the World Cyber Games has become huge

Big money, big prizes, I love it!

What's significantly more surprising is just how big competitions are getting around the world. The World Cyber Games in San Francisco brought together 700 champion gamers from 64 countries to compete, including national finals; the WCG paid out an estimated \$2.5 million in prize money during the 2004 calendar year, and more than \$400,000 at the San Francisco championship alone. Organizers say that roughly 30,000 people attended the WCG's tournament and outdoor festivities over the event's five days, and the total television viewership of the WCG per year was estimated to be a staggering 1.3 billion people. (Keep in mind that there are fewer than 6.5 billion people in the entire world.)

So who are the best gamers in the world? The Americans finished a solid third in the San Francisco finals, while South Korea earned gold and silver medals in *StarCraft*, solidifying second. And in something of an upset, the top medal winner in the world was the Netherlands, for winning in *WarCraft III* and *Unreal Tournament 2004*. Spokespeople say it's strictly coincidence that the winning nation has legalized prostitution and marijuana. **■ Evan Shamoon**

## 5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW

What we said when you were rising



### 5 Years Ago, January 2000

On the cover: Satan, Michael Jordan, and Gordon Freeman. Inside, we use the "s" word to describe *Professional Bull Rider*. Well, what

did you expect—after all, we were staring the ruin of civilization straight in the face as the infamous Y2K catastrophe bore down on us (hence our weird four-page Y2K CGW parody featuring a review of *Paper Triangle Football*). At least we had some great games like *Homeworld* and *Freespace 2*, both given 4.5 stars in this issue, to take our steadily declining minds off our troubles.



### 10 Years Ago, January 1995

What did we love a decade ago? How's about *Relentless*, the first and totally awesome Twinsen game? It looked great, it sounded great, and it played great—all this on a 486/25 CPU with a whopping 4MB of RAM and a hard drive—gobbling 11MB of disk space. What else did we love? How's about *Doom II* and *Tie Fighter*, both of which got several pages of in-depth strategy coverage? We also loved *Panzer General*, which got 5 stars and was lauded for its great playability, style, and balance.



### 15 Years Ago, January 1990

Once upon a time, games were made by dedicated fans who had little to no marketing money left after investing in all those snazzy Ziploc bags they released their games in. So they posed for their own ads. Gladly, this issue featured countless wannabe ninjas and karate champs and lords and lasses and gumshoes decked out in makeshift costumes and photographed in their mom's basement. Check out the *Windwalker* guy. Holy Moses, what's that all about? Next to the ads, the 16-color graphics of the games looked especially stellar.

NEWS  
FEED

Can't wait for next month's 5, 10, 15 column? Neither can the guys at <http://cgw.vintagegaming.org>, who are archiving our past 245 issues.



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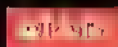
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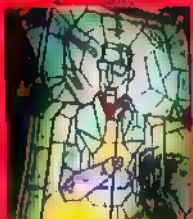


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## THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

News and views from the Wild West



### The Good Half-Life 2 ships! Finally! Really!

Hey, we've longer have to do a cover story on

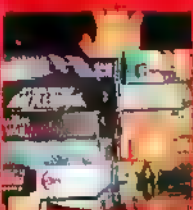
exclusive hands-on story, or reports about code thefts and, of course, the inevitable delays. By the time you read this, the game should be out, and unless you're a pirate, you should already own a copy. And if you do live in a cave, check to see if it's wired for broadband. Then you can just download the game off Steam.



### The Bad Half-Life 2 ships! Finally!

Now that the game is finally out, what the hell else is there to look forward to? The next ride?

The hex-based war game? Um, maybe not. Let's just say that the next year won't exactly be going to be sparse when it comes to PC gaming, but 2004 will be a much busier year to follow.



### The Ugly Too many games!

Remember when you had the PC Half-Life 2 new finally shipped case, with the

we mentioned that enough? Like for Doom 3, Home, Total War, and a number of new classics. The problem: We now have a Himalayan mountain-sized pile of games to plow through well into next year. Hey, publishers, we keep saying that but would it kill you to spread out releases throughout the year?

MOD SQUAD

# StarCraft Recrafted

Devoted fans of Blizzard's classic remake the original

It's been six long years since the Zergs first invaded, and there's still no sequel to one of the greatest PC games of all time. When it comes to *StarCraft*, some people aren't content to wait any longer. Scott "Skizot Enigma" Deason and the Project Revolution team (<http://revolution.wc3campaigns.com/>) are undertaking one the most ambitious mods on record: remaking *StarCraft: Brood War* entirely within *WarCraft III*.

Deason, who has been working on *WarCraft III* mods since the game was in beta, is amazed by how much work has gone into this. "I don't know of any other *WarCraft III* mod as complex as ours. This is a full multiplayer total conversion," says Deason, the project leader, "and while single-player campaigns may be created they probably won't be in the first release." He was also quick to point out that "[the team] puts in just as many (if not more) hours as I do." Still, this isn't their full-time job—it's a labor of love. Every character, every structure, even the HUD is being faithfully re-created, but it's all in 3D. That, according to members of the team, is causing a ripple in the community. Purists hate the idea, while many others are anxious to see *StarCraft* in 3D. The team is not, however, putting its own spin on the *StarCraft* universe with new units or structures. "Then it wouldn't be *StarCraft* anymore," says Deason.

## The legal issues

The bigger looming concern is the legality of the whole project. At press time, the team was drafting a letter to Blizzard seeking permission to continue the project without violating intellectual property laws. The only way to make a mod for *WarCraft III*, according to the team, is to make new MPQ files—and Blizzard doesn't take too kindly to that. The spokespeople at Blizzard we spoke to said off the record that it would be tough to convince the powers that be to let the project continue. But the Project Revolution team made it clear that they are huge Blizzard fans and only want to help grow the community. They are even willing to put in security so that you couldn't play the game without owning *StarCraft: Brood War*, *WarCraft III*, and *The Frozen Throne*.

Besides seeing their project through to completion, what do they hope to gain from all this? Jobs would be nice—Blizzard has hired modders before.

There's still a lot that needs to be done, but after two years of development—carried out by 21 people, like Kdub from Texas, Zhenyok and Red from Russia, and Xttoes from Georgia—the game should be moving into a closed beta by the time you read this. Whether Blizzard will allow the mod to be released—well, that's another story.

By Darren Gladstone

## Besides seeing this through to the end, what is the team hoping to accomplish? Getting jobs at Blizzard.



NEWS  
FEED

Leisure Suit Larry is banned in Australia for sexual content. And here we thought it was because the game is lousy. Warren Spector, the man behind *Thief*, *Deus Ex*, and other sneaky games, has left Ion Storm to pursue "other interests."



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How does one describe the underground magazine

*Vice*? It's full of what's been kicking around in your head but you've been either 1) too drunk to write it down or 2) scared to say it out loud for fear of getting your butt kicked. This book, which is a collection of fashion critiques, is hilarious and hard to put down.



**CLOTHES**  
**Geekwearz**

\$5, WWW.GEEK-

WEARZ.COM

If you're a nerd, you've gotta wear it on your sleeve—hence this line of

geekcentric T-shirts we stumbled across during a trip to QuakeCon. We got a look at the full line of clothes, and we got to tell you, some of the stuff doesn't suck. Check it out for yourself!



**BOOK**  
**America**

\$17, WWW.

AMAZON.COM

We're huge fans of *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central. Although touted as a fake news show, it's

better than most "real" news broadcasts. And as soon as you crack open the show's book, *The Daily Show With John Stewart Presents America (The Book): A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction*, you'll have instant high-school flashbacks. Constructed like a school textbook (there are end-of-chapter discussion questions such as "Why do you think the framers made the Constitution so soul-crushingly boring?"), this is the best textbook ever!



**MUSIC**  
**K-Os, Joyful Rebellion**

\$14, WWW.

AMAZON.COM

If you're down with the Roots, then you already appreciate a

little rock and jazz infused into your hip-hop. K-Os takes that ball and runs with it. *Joyful Rebellion* has outful sounds, great hooks, funky beats, and something that anybody can appreciate. Bang your head and grab this disc!



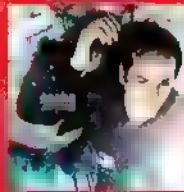
**DVD**  
**Dawn of the Dead**

\$20, WWW.

AMAZON.COM

Remakes often make our zombie-lovin' skin crawl. But when

this movie hit theaters, we were instant believers—all the style and fun of the original movies was most definitely there. This DVD not only adds a truckload of gore that wasn't in the theatrical version, it also includes a bunch of extra material that adds a whole lot to the backstory. See the video diary of Andy (the guy holed up in the gun store) and a compilation of newscasts covering the end of the world.



**Sasha Involver**

\$13, WWW.

AMAZON.COM

Infectious electronic grooves hooked us when we gave this CD a shot. Hell,

we aren't even normally fans of this type of music, but *Involver* sucked us in. All 10 tracks glide with smooth transitions and solid beats. This is our pick for a good way to calm down after a few too many deathmatches.



**Rubber-band Pistol**

\$5, WWW.RUBBER-

BANDGUNS.COM

For those too cheap for paintball or laser tag, this could be the

most economical way to vie for office dominance. Shoot fools that dare enter your cube. However, you might need to cough up an additional three bucks for the goggles. After all, you might shoot someone's eye out, kid.

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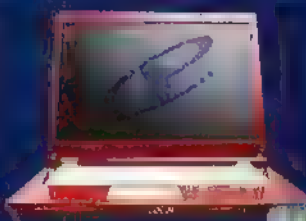
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# Previews

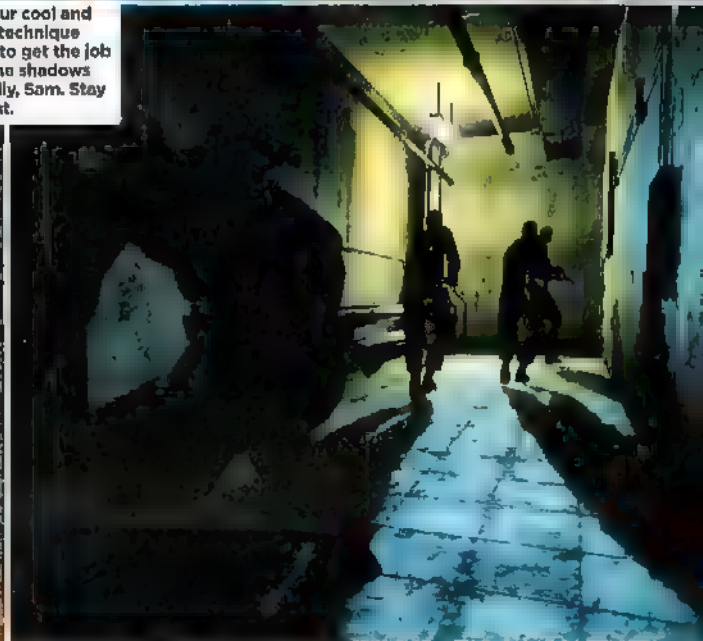
See 'em now, play 'em soon



This assignment will frequently put you in close proximity to the enemy.



Keep your cool and use every technique you know to get the job done. The shadows are your ally, Sam. Stay out of sight.







We deliver the first-ever screens and info on EA's first *Sims 2* expansion pack.



Liquid's next big real-time strategy game takes place in the fantastic world of Eberron.



This sci-fi epic shows us what happens when man sets his sights on outer space.

Ubisoft DEVELOPER **Ubisoft Montreal** TYPE **Stealth-Action** RELEASE DATE **March 2005**

# Splinter Cell Chaos Theory

Code Black: For the eyes of agent Sam Fisher

**S**am, the Third Echelon has another highly sensitive assignment for you. Your goal this time will be hostage extraction. We know it isn't your usual type of work, but this is a matter of international security that goes much deeper than a mere rescue attempt. The hostage is Bruce Morgenholt, an engineer previously employed by computer expert Abraham Zherkezkil. The two men worked together on reverse-engineering the Masse Kernels for the United Nations, and they possess potentially dangerous knowledge that must be kept out of enemy hands at all costs.

The alleged kidnappers are the People's Voice, a guerrilla group led by Peruvian nationalist Hugo Lacerda. The group has been very vocal in its recruitment of followers to aid against state oppressors, and it plays a dangerous game of information warfare. Morgenholt must be intercepted and debriefed ASAP, and Lacerda—along with anyone in possession of Morgenholt's secrets—must be dealt with.

That's not all. We also have reason to believe that the kidnapping may have been contracted by an outside party. Intelligence reports indicate that Lacerda has recently come into possession of a substantial arms shipment, which may have been used to pay off his group's abduction efforts. Zherkezkil himself may even be involved, judging from the inside secrets used to carry out several recent information warfare attacks in both the United States and Japan.

## Carte blanche

Your mission is to extract Morgenholt, deal with the separatist group, and investigate the possibility of additional outside threats. Among your destinations this time are Peru and several potential locations throughout Asia, possibly including China and Korea. You won't receive the usual level of strict guidance from us on this assignment; you are given clearance to approach these stealth missions however you see fit, so long as the job gets done. You might even discover several ways to accomplish your objectives. We're going to trust your judgment on this one, Sam.

You'll be operating in closer proximity to the enemy than ever before, so don't hesitate to use every stealth technique at your disposal. Never underestimate the power of surprise—a guard who doesn't see you underfoot won't have time to react when you pull him from his ledge. And you can easily get the drop on unsuspecting sentries and snap their necks from overhead. Be sure to pay careful attention to the ambient noise level, too—you'll want to move as quietly as possible in low-volume areas, and loud environments can provide excellent cover for your activities.

Don't overlook your field equipment, either. Your recent knife training should be very advantageous for silent kills, makeshift lock picking, and quiet access

to certain areas. You should also employ your sticky cams whenever possible—in multiples, if necessary. We've even taken the liberty of equipping your pistol with an Optically Channeled Potentiator, which you can use to emit a brief antielectronics frequency. You should be well taken care of in terms of gear.

## Reinforcements

You'll be glad to know that we're also sending in some additional support. A pair of NSA operatives will cooperate behind the scenes with their own set of objectives in order to make things easier for you. This crack team has been trained in a number of co-op exercises, including rappelling, the human ladder, and a few collaborative martial arts techniques.

We have every reason to believe you will succeed at this assignment, Sam—you're the best we've got. However, if you'd like to hone your training a little more, you are always welcome to participate in our spies-versus-mercenaries war games. We've even incorporated some new techniques and gadgets into the exercises this time around. As you can see, every precaution has been taken to prepare you for the mission ahead. We're counting on you—don't let us down. **G. Ryan Scott**

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**Don't hesitate to use every stealth technique at your disposal.**





# The Sims 2





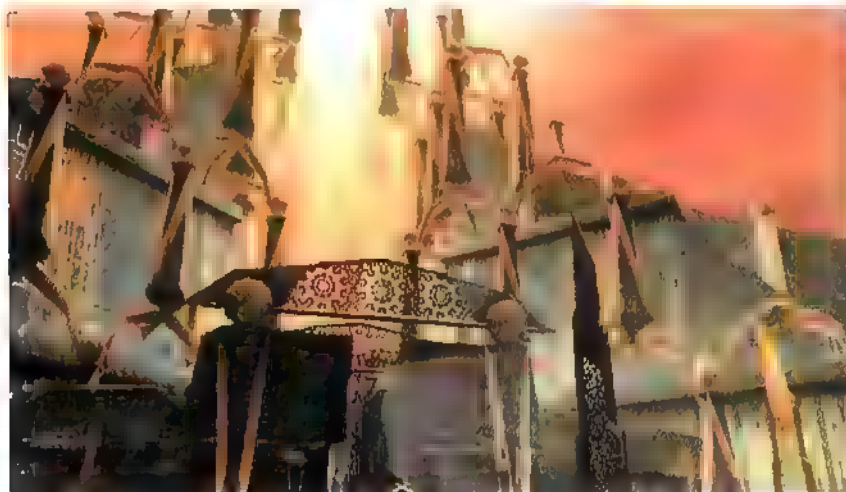
**P** You knew it was coming, and here it is: the first of an inevitable half-decade's worth of expansion packs for *The Sims 2*. And you know what? It sounds pretty darn good. *University* shoehorns an entire new life stage—young adult—in between teen and adult, letting your Sim offspring go away to college to earn degrees in 11 different majors, enhance their skills, deal with a whole new slate of fears and aspirations, and just generally embarrass themselves with typically debauched collegiate behavior. Your Sims will also be able to earn money tutoring other students, hang out in new community lots, deal with the darks in their dorm, and even pledge a sorority or fraternity (please, please, please God, let there be a big Paddle of Initiation ceremony). We'll have more on this baby prior to its March release—and, no doubt, details on the second expansion approximately 15 seconds later.

# University

JBL SHIP NCsoft DEVELOPER ArenaNet EN MMORPG RELEASE 17 February 2005

# Guild Wars

Getting straight to the point



**M**MOs are a bum deal for casual gamers. If you have a day job or a second hobby, you're just not as good at those games as any 14-year-old able to devote an entire week to leveling up his bread-making skill. *Guild Wars* puts players on a more level field: New characters can ascend to the level limit very quickly, and items have been carefully balanced with disadvantages to offset their

bonuses. There's also a detailed skill system that discourages power gaming.

Skill selection is where a good portion of your strategy and preparation take place. A character can learn up to 150 skills, though no more than eight such skills can be taken into battle, which forces players to come up with effective combinations. Strategy and creativity determine the outcome here—not the degree of social life you're willing to sacrifice in favor of your orc-stabbing career.

## User friendly

Speaking as someone who gave up on the genre long ago, it appears to me that the people at ArenaNet hate all the right things about MMOs. Besides all but eliminating the leveling treadmill, they've also curbed the menial chores—and not just obvious ones like chopping wood or fighting the same swamp troll 800 times. For example, instead of waiting five hours for my health bar to refill after combat, I was amazed to see it replenish almost instantly. Travel times are cut down severely as well; just as I started the long walk back to town, I



OMG HI 2 U! WANT 2 FIGHT SOME GUILD WARZ?

noticed that I could select my destination on the map and get there much faster. Why doesn't anyone else think of these things? It's a simple yet brilliant concept: create an MMO that doesn't punish you for playing it.

Not only is *Guild Wars* fun, but the lack of a monthly fee also means you're free to play as much as you want without spending another dime—until, of course, the expansion packs start rolling in. The team is very confident that it can stay on a schedule of two new expansions every year, thanks to a streamlined set of development tools. Each will reportedly offer players a number of new character classes, skills, items, and fresh PVE missions that are comparable in scope to an entirely new game.

The developers continue to describe *Guild Wars* as *Magic* meets *Diablo*. Teams of up to eight players can fight through the game's main story, which is "more *Conan* than *Lord of the Rings*" according to lead producer Jeff Strain. Whether the plot is compelling or not, *Guild Wars* should be a fresh experience, thanks to its strategic skill system, the attention to PVP gameplay as well as PVE, and the level of respect the developers seem to have for your need to cut the crap and get to the good parts. **Seanbaby**



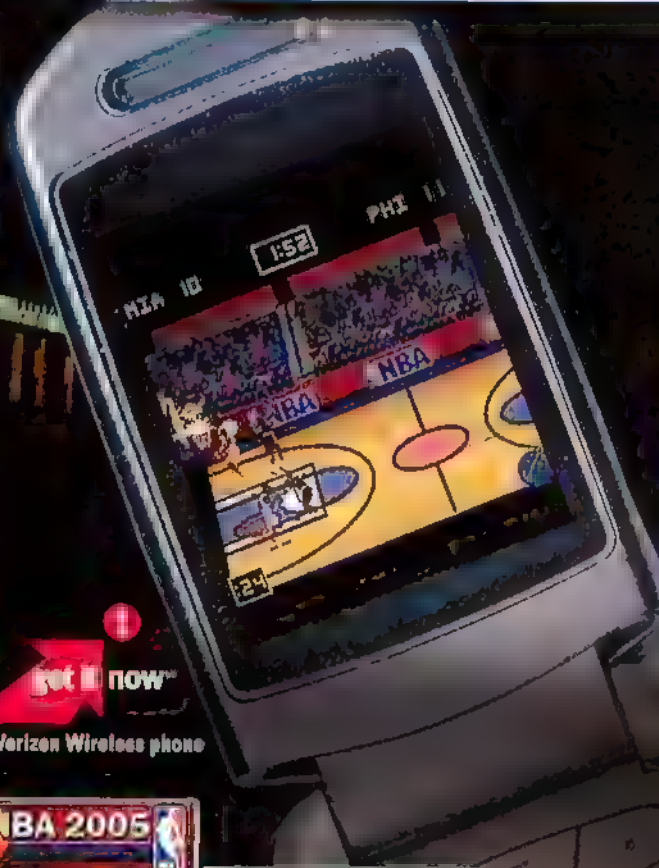
Earning levels is fast and easy, so you can get right to the fun stuff.

It appears that the people at ArenaNet hate all the right things about MMOs.

BATTLE-WORTHY



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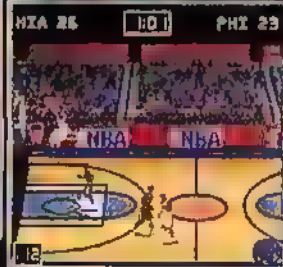


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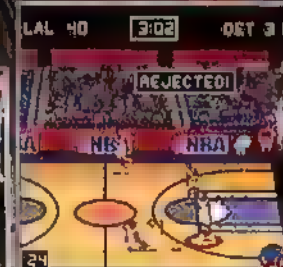
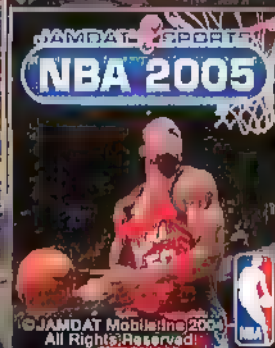
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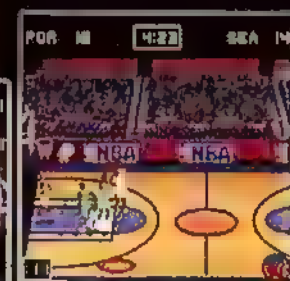
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# PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

Game	Developer	Expected
Act of War: Direct Action	Atari	Q3 '05
Advent Rising	THQ	Q3 '05
Age of Empires III	Microsoft	Q3 '05
Asheron's Call: Throne of Destiny	Turbine/Entertainment	Q3 '05
Auto Assault	NetGolf	Q3 '05
The Bard's Tale	THQ	Q3 '05
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Q3 '05
The Battle of Britain	Ubisoft	Q3 '05
BioShock	2K	Q3 '05
Black & White 2	THQ	Q3 '05
Blacklog II	GoV Software	Q3 '05
Brothers in Arms	Ubisoft	Q3 '05
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Slipgate Software	Q3 '05
Call of Duty 2 (working title)	Activision	Q3 '05
Camelot: The Dark Kingdom	THQ	Q3 '05
City of Villains	THQ	Q3 '05
Civilization IV	Atari	Q3 '05
Cold War	Electronic Arts	Q3 '05
Commandos: Strike Force	Ubisoft	Q3 '05
Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars	CD Projekt	Q3 '05
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	Atari	Q3 '05
Dragon Age	THQ	Q3 '05
Dragonshard	Atari	Q3 '05
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	Ubisoft	Q3 '05
Dungeon Siege II	THQ	Q3 '05
Dungeons & Dragons Online	Atari	Q3 '05
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	Bethesda Softworks	Q3 '05
Empire Earth II	THQ	Q3 '05
F.E.A.R.	Atari	Q3 '05
Fallout 3	THQ	Q3 '05
Freedom Fighters 2 (working title)	THQ	Q3 '05
Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich	Viva! Entertainment	Q3 '05
Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	Q3 '05
Gothic II: The Night of the Raven	GoV	Q3 '05
Gothic III	GoV	Q3 '05
Guild Wars	THQ	Q3 '05
Hitman: Blood Money	Slipgate Software	Q3 '05
Imperator	THQ	Q3 '05
Imperial Glory	Ubisoft	Q3 '05

■ New Update

PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: Liquid Entertainment GENRE: Real-time Strategy  
RELEASE DATE: March 2005

# Dragonshard

D&D + RTS + MTG

Note to self: When you find yourself in a creepy graveyard containing a skull-strewn altar, run. Run fast.

"When I first sat down with Liquid Entertainment to talk about doing an RTS set in the now *Dungeons & Dragons* world of *Eberron*," says Atari's John Hight, "I wanted to do at least three things people had never seen in an RTS before." Three things? Is there even one thing left? Where's an innovative RTS to go anymore?

## Watch your head

Although you can see elements of *Dragonshard*'s innovations in other titles, there is indeed something different going on here. The core of the design is a split-level map that is more than just a second level tucked under the first. Indeed, *Dragonshard*'s underworlds are an elaborate take on *WarCraft III*'s creep hunting, and true to the *D&D* experience, you can explore underworld areas only with a party of hero units (no armies allowed). This produces the feeling of sending down an away team. You'll finally have a use for rogue abilities like picking locks and disarming deadly traps, and these hunts also function as your main method of collecting gold—which you'll need in order to

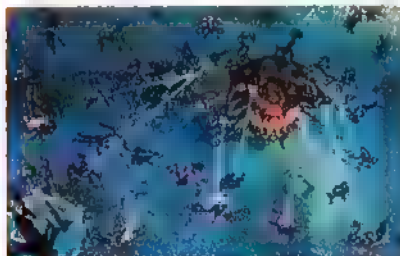


lg and Ook versus a bunch of fancy-pants knights.

build your city and train your units. The game's other major resource—the eponymous dragonshard crystals, will periodically appear on the overworld map as they plummet from the sky.

## Civil engineering

And then there's the city building. As in *Kohan II*, each city is a large on-map structure with built-in walls that discourage rushing. But unlike every other RTS, there are no tech tree limits to restrict your opening moves; instead, *Dragonshard* uses a do-it-yourself model that Hight likens to "building a deck of *Magic: The Gathering* cards." Your city has a grid of 16 slots in which you may place any building you can afford. What you put in the slots—and where you put them in relation to one another—determines which units you can recruit and what powers you can access. Multiple instances of certain buildings lead to higher-level units. It could make for an interesting dynamic—not to mention a fresh spin, which many RTS titles sorely lack. **—Tom Chick**



The mighty Beholder can take down entire squads of soldiers.

FENG SHUI



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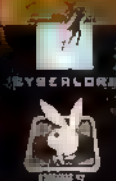
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PlayStation 2



## PIPELINE

Game	Developer	Expected
Jaws	EA GAMES	2005
King Kong	Ubisoft	2005
Logo Star Wars	LucasArts	2005
The Matrix Online	EA GAMES	2005
Middle-earth Online	Gameforge	2005
MotoGP 3	EA GAMES	2005
The Movies	EA GAMES	2005
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	EA GAMES	2005
Neverwinter Nights 2	EA GAMES	2005
Nexus: The Jupiter Incident	Midis	2005
Operation Flashpoint 2	EA GAMES	2005
Origin of the Species	EA GAMES	2005
Pariah	EA GAMES	2005
Project Snowblind	EA GAMES	2005
Psychonauts	EA GAMES	2005
Psychotic	EA GAMES	2005
The Runther	EA GAMES	2005
Gurko IV	EA GAMES	2005
The Roots	EA GAMES	2005
STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl	EA GAMES	2005
Sacred Underworld	EA GAMES	2005
Scarface	EA GAMES	2005
Serious Sam 2	EA GAMES	2005
Silent Hunter II	EA GAMES	2005
Splitter Cell: Chaos Theory	EA GAMES	2005
Star Wars: KOTOR II: The Sith Lords	EA GAMES	2005
Star Wars: Republic Commando	EA GAMES	2005
State of Emergency 2	EA GAMES	2005
Stolen	EA GAMES	2005
Stronghold 2	EA GAMES	2005
SWAT 4	EA GAMES	2005
Tribula Rasa	EA GAMES	2005
Team Fortress 2	EA GAMES	2005
Brotherhood of Arms	EA GAMES	2005
Tomb Raider VII (working title)	EA GAMES	2005
Top Spin	EA GAMES	2005
UFO: AfterShock	EA GAMES	2005
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	EA GAMES	2005
World of Warcraft	EA GAMES	2005
X2: The Return	EA GAMES	2005
Yes: The Ark of Naphthim	EA GAMES	2005

Now Update

PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal DEVELOPER: Midis/HO Interactive GENRE: Strategy  
RELEASE DATE: February 2005Nexus: The Jupiter Incident  
Lost in space

Ever since *Star Trek* emasculated the Klingons, there's been a dire need for old-fashioned space-based scum and villainy. The creators of *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident* have thankfully found their greatest enemy, and in the words of cartoonist Walt Kelly, he is us.

A fleet simulator in three dimensions, *Nexus* supposes man has gone out into space and that competing heartless megaconglomerates are struggling to achieve domination over one another. Players control the battleship *Stiletto* and its stalwart commander Capt. Marcus Cromwell and must piece together the mystery of the titular Jupiter Incident while simultaneously making the world safe for someone's version of capitalism.

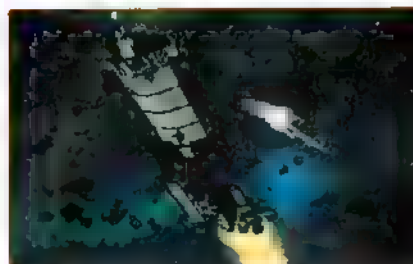
The opening mission sees the *Stiletto* racing to assist—for its own greedy purposes—an enemy base. But peril looms; reports indicate two other factions are gunning for the target as well. Worse, the installation is ringed with killer missile-spitting defense satellites that are malfunctioning, attacking anything that

approaches. Armchair generals are dropped into the fray, assigned multiple objectives, and left with the pause button as their only ally in a plight to win...or suck the void of outer space trying.

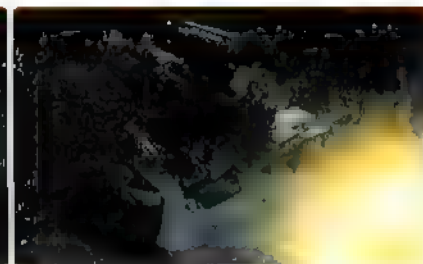
As huge starships roll in, the game's handy function keys and mouse controls allow players to assault enemy ships with long-range artillery, strike weak areas with a focused laser attack, or hammer an enemy hull with explosives. Commandos stand ready to perform rescues or reconnaissance missions. Fighter squadrons await the call to arms and can be ordered to guard, attack, or escort larger craft. Damage-control teams await catastrophe and, if used in a timely fashion, can stave it off. Crewmen grow into their roles as their skills improve with time. When you take all this into consideration, *Nexus* is nothing but brain-chokingly thorough in its simulation aspects. Prepare for battle—the day of the Jupiter Incident is fast approaching. **B Greg Orlando**

INTERVIEW: ZERO-G

Players must piece together the mystery of the titular Jupiter Incident while simultaneously making the world safe for someone's version of capitalism.



☐ You'll encounter plenty of strange interstellar craft during your travels.



☐ The *Stiletto* hurtles through space in search of adventure.



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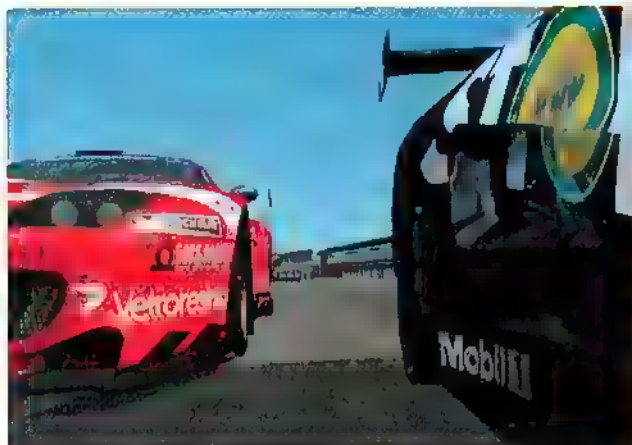
## DIGITAL UNDERGROUND

FROM SimBin/Totale AVAILABILITY Q1 2005

## GTR

**Word on the street:** Billed as "the most realistic racing game ever," this puppy puts you behind the wheels of cars (Porsche 996 GT3-RS, Ferrari 360 Modena) from the FIA GT championship. Simulating everything from weather conditions to G-forces, the game supports a staggering 56 simultaneous onscreen vehicles and offers authentic courses including Anderstorp and Monza. Dynamic track layouts and a detailed presentation (including meticulous damage modeling and sounds sampled from real roadsters) see this one fly right past its rivals.

**Sounds kinda beat:** Despite a splendid sales pitch, the simulation is still targeted at a niche audience. West Racing's *Racing Legends* tried a similar approach; for all we know, that title is enjoying a permanent pit stop. Developer SimBin hasn't yet made its mark on interactive entertainment, either. However, considering that the crew there is managed by a pro driver (three-time Swedish GT champion Henrik Roos), we're fairly certain SimBin will deliver.

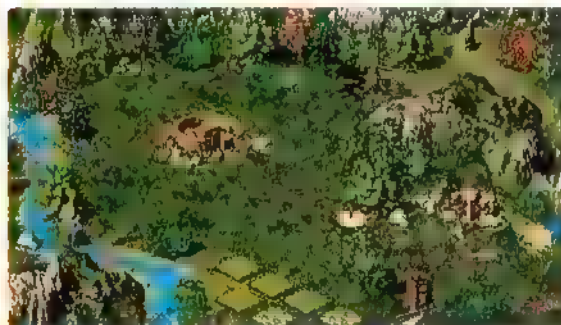


FROM Cateia Games AVAILABILITY Q1 2005

## The Kings of the Dark Age

**Word on the street:** This game is a tantalizing cocktail of turn-based strategy and real-time skirmishes set atop the backdrop of medieval Europe. Vying for domination over 17 countries, players employ diplomacy and direct force against opponents, wielding more than 30 unique units and weapons when necessary. Highlights include castle sieges, cutthroat economic exchanges, and chaotic battles filled with flaming arrows and fallen soldiers. A 40-minute soundtrack accompanies the action during solo struggles or four-man multiplayer matches via LAN or Internet connection.

**Sounds kinda beat:** For starters, you might have heard the premise once—or 16 times—before. Croatian-based Cateia Games has been in the business since 1996, and not a single piece of software from the firm has made its way Stateside—never an auspicious sign. But the crew has recently teamed up with Zuxxez, makers of *Once Upon a Knight*, for help with production, which, depending on your fondness for cows, could be a positive or a negative thing.



FROM ClownKeep AVAILABILITY Q1 2005

## The Chronicles of Ny

**Word on the street:** *Chronicles* is an episodic 3D fantasy role-playing saga featuring a series of self-contained scenarios that demands armchair adventurers prevent death from descending upon the realm of Racorr. Customize a character, assign alter egos a race and skills, then uncover an insidious conspiracy while recruiting allies and wreaking havoc on encroaching barbarians and bandits. Classic sword and sorcery fare, multiple endings, and myriad side quests give the tale character, while hidden areas and harrowing brushes with hideous beasts lend it longevity.

**Sounds kinda beat:** Industry insiders have seen similar concepts come and go without making a mark, it's uncertain whether anyone truly wants serialized software programs. ClownKeep is a textbook startup to boot—none of its core members boast blockbuster games on their resumes. But in an era of multimillion-dollar productions and bloated teams, the unknown collective could come out on top, provided it can get its act together. We'll keep an open mind—at least for now.



COMING SPRING 2005  
FROM THE CREATORS OF UNREAL

# PARLAH

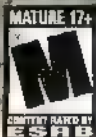
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD  
BY THE EDITORS OF

# 102 FREE GAMES

**A** recent survey had 35 percent of legal, the Internet contains a lot of free games for you fall into three basic categories: free to download and keep, some are free to download and play, and some are free to download and play. Of course, there are a lot of free games out there—but there's also a lot of fair game. If you're getting started with the good stuff, And here's a link to all of them: <http://102freegames.com>







# FREE TO OWN

That's right—you can get your hands on this stuff for nothing. Zip. Nada. Zilch. Just download the executable files and they're yours to keep. As our grandmothers would say, "Such a deal! Are you sure you're getting enough to eat? Why don't you call us more?"



<http://w1.435.kelln.com/~u43509647/aimind.html>  
Become an expert code breaker in this *Mastermind* clone. Its three difficulty levels are sure to keep you entertained for a long while. Plus, the two-player mode means you'll actually be interacting with at least one human being for a little while!

<http://fifth.furtoons.com/>  
*Babylon 5* has some of the most professional graphics we've seen in a freeware game. It looks great and it plays smoothly. Because they employ real-world physics, the ship controls are easy to learn. The story line is detailed without being tedious, and the enemy ship A.I. is decent enough to present an actual challenge. Even for those who don't care about the series, this title has a lot to offer.

[www.dwhan.net/uki/shooting/](http://www.dwhan.net/uki/shooting/)  
As a robot equipped with thrusters, lasers, and missiles, you endure and deflect interminable onslaughts of enemy ships in this first-rate Japanese horizontal shooter. You're defending not only yourself, but also the mother ship to your left that's invisible. If too much enemy fire passes by you, the mother ship is injured. So keep an eye on both health bars as you approach the big boss.

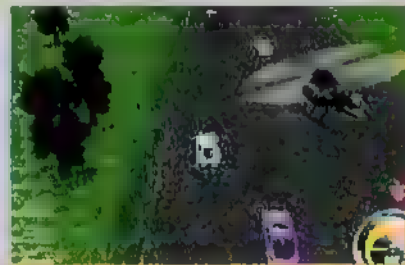
<http://retrospect.sgn.net>  
Snub the highway patrol and satisfy your semicontrolled road rage! Demolish enemy cars with missiles, oil slicks, and smoke screens as you careen down the highway at incredible speeds. Unfortunately, you're forbidden to fire upon pesky pedestrians and so-called innocent bystanders.



Babylon 5



Cloudphobia



Highway Pursuit

## Flash Games

It might just put us out of business to say this, but you don't really need to spend \$50 at your local retail store to have a grand old time gaming on your PC. There are tons of great gaming websites that will let you play games for free right on their sites, without the need to download a thing (except maybe Macromedia's free *Flash Player* to run the game). There are 60 gazillion free *Flash* game sites out there (yes, we counted), so there's no way to cover them all, but here are a few of our favorite sites and a couple of cool games from each.

### Yahoo Games

[www.games.yahoo.com](http://www.games.yahoo.com)



It's the perfect gaming website for your mom. And we don't mean that in a bad way, we swear. Yahoo! hosts a great selection of free card, arcade, puzzle, and word games, none of which has a single exploding head, swearword, or naked body part.

### Alchemy

PopCap Games—mentioned elsewhere in this feature—may be the single greatest game developer on the planet. Yahoo hosts a bunch of PopCap games, including *Alchemy*, a puzzle game guaranteed to waste entire days. Play it at work!

### Cribbage

The coolest thing about Yahoo Games is the plethora of multi-player games, and the popular-

ty of the site guarantees you'll always find an opponent. CGW Editor-In-Chief Jeff Green swears by *Yahoo Cribbage*, a nicely done version of the classic card game.

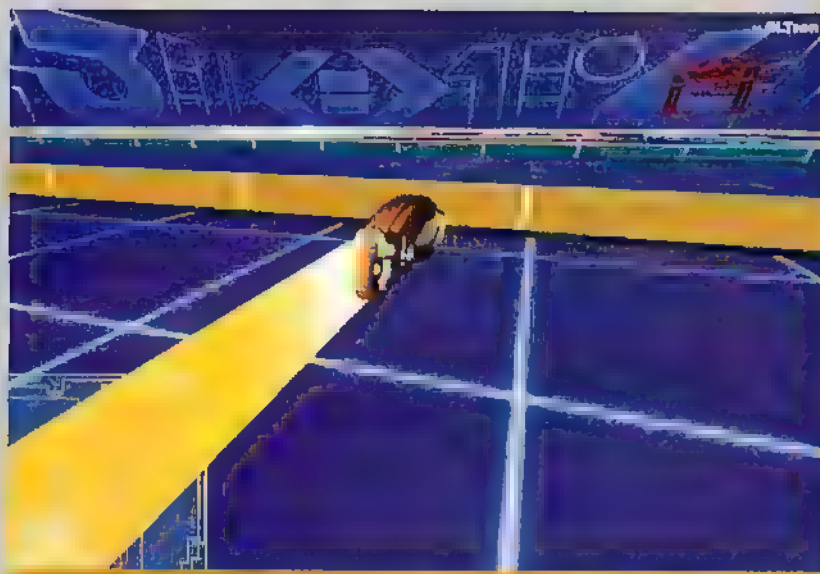
### Newgrounds

[www.newgrounds.com](http://www.newgrounds.com)



This once small site originated, in 1991 as, of all things, a NeoGeo fanzine. Now it



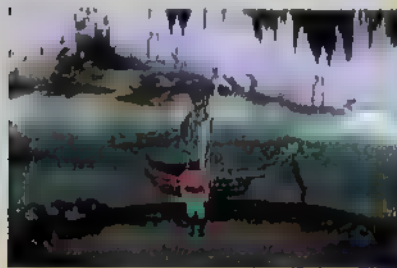


<http://retrospec.sgn.net>

You say you want a revolution? In this RPG, your goal is to incite revolt. In order to accomplish this, you'll need to use your head and your heels, highly trained operatives.

[www.tlornentertainment.com](http://www.tlornentertainment.com)

These fan-based remakes of Roberta Williams' classics crush the competition—their incredibly enhanced graphics and improved puzzles add depth to the overall gameplay. Both *King's Quest I* VGA and



King's Quest

*King's Quest II+ VGA* make for engaging additions to any freeware folder

[www.the-underdogs.org](http://www.the-underdogs.org)

Acclaimed as the best spoof game of all time, *Maniac Mansion* has held its own since 1987. Sporting more than 13 possible character changes, multiple puzzle solutions, and four different endings, *Maniac Mansion* has a versatile, nonlinear plot. Plus, there's a great interface, decent graphics, and challenging puzzles.



Maniac Mansion



**N**

[www.harveycartel.org/melanet/n.html](http://www.harveycartel.org/melanet/n.html)

While lacking in name and plot, *N* offers much more than first meets the eye. In a complicated maze format, you play a ninja trapped in an underground dungeon, collecting coins that add seconds to your overall timer. The ingenious puzzles require more thought than average puzzle games and perhaps some knowledge of physics. There are many interesting, gruesome ways for stickman to die if you don't understand his limits—or if you're just sadistic.

[www25.brinkster.com/lucasfan/games/](http://www25.brinkster.com/lucasfan/games/)

Luckless reporter Zak McKracken is at it again. The fan-made sequel to *Zak McKracken and the Alien Rockstars*, this new adventure-puzzle game proves to be just as amusing and well thought out as its predecessor.



Zak McKracken and the Alien Rockstars

has mushroomed into a huge, popular repository of *Flash* games and films, among other things. Some mature content here, so parents beware.

### Alien Hominid

Newgrounds' big success story is *Alien Hominid*, an excellent, wonderfully animated 2D side-scroller about to jump to the big leagues on the PS2 and GameCube—but you can play the original, for free, right here on your PC.

### Ultimate Flash Sonic

Everyone's favorite digital hedgehog has been lovingly recaptured in this cool side-scroller that will give older gamers serious '90s flashbacks.

### Shockwave

[www.shockwave.com](http://www.shockwave.com)



Like Yahoo Games, this is a great mainstream site with an ever-growing library

of cool *Flash* games and films. You'll find both original content here and some of the more ubiquitous games, like the ever-popular PopCap titles.

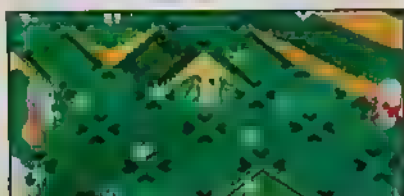
### Daily Jigsaw

The idea of doing a jigsaw puzzle on a PC screen may seem lame, but hey, so did listening to music on a PC a few years ago. Shockwave's daily jigsaw is actually loads of fun, with a very cool interface that lets you do things that "real" jigsaw puzzles

don't, like only show the edge pieces. Who needs *Half-Life 2* with these kinds of thrills?

### Shapeshifter

This is one of those annoying little puzzle games that seems absolutely lame at first, but before you know it, you've been hypnotized, days have gone by, and your family has moved out on you. What do you do? You match shapes with their outlines. That's it. A game even cavemen would love.



## Quazatron

» <http://retrospex.sgn.net>

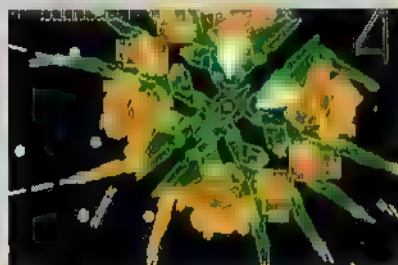
Have a shootout with enemy robots, then interface with them in order to gain their upgrades. Take care, though—with so many foes aiming at you, it's hard not to get caught in the crossfire.

» <http://www.biq.org/~nikoz/>

This game is among the most addictive platform shooters in the business. Its graphics—like those in most freeware developed by the Japanese—are amazing. Destroy as many of the ever-growing, monstrous battleships as you can while also fighting against the timer. Every time you get shot down, the timer decreases, so be wary of such tricky weapons as lasers and radiating missiles.

» <http://anywhereont.com/noctis.html>

In *Noctis*, there are no weapons, no combat, no huge bosses—just an endless galaxy of stars to explore. It sounds boring, but the details and spectacular graphics make up for the lack of blood and guts.



Noctis



Tyrian 2000

» [www.the-underdogs.org](http://www.the-underdogs.org)

With just one life, you must survive onslaught after onslaught of enemy fire. Sporting a decent plotline, numerous ship upgrades, and cool graphics, *Tyrian 2000* is more engaging than a lot of shooters you'll pay for.

» [www.glttron.org/](http://www.glttron.org/)

Construct mazes to trap your opponents as you blaze over the battle arena while trying to avoid their own walls. With easy controls, respectable graphics, and quick gameplay, *GLTron* is completely engrossing but doesn't take forever to play.



GLTron



Warning Forever

## Games (cont.)

### EBaum's World

» [www.ebaumsworld.com](http://www.ebaumsworld.com)

Known primarily as a repository of hilarious crank phone calls and videos (Bubb Rubb, anyone?), EBaum's World also has a pretty great selection of Flash games. Like

Newgrounds.com, this one is all over the map in terms of "appropriateness," so tread lightly.

### Pac-Man

Perhaps you have heard of this one. This is an excellent little Flash version, complete with all those sounds that still reside somewhere in our subconscious. The novelty of not having to

feed quarters into the PC never, ever gets old.

### Kick Ups

How long can you keep this soccer ball up in the air? How long can you play this game before you start hating yourself? This might either be the dumbest thing we've ever seen or, quite possibly, the greatest game of all time.

### ArenaScape

» [www.arenascape.com](http://www.arenascape.com)



A well-done free MMORPG, with tens of thousands playing at any one time.

Graphicswise, you get what you pay for, of course, but an amazing achievement, nonetheless.



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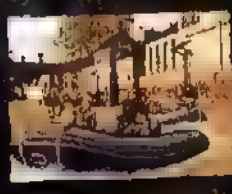
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# FREE TO TRY

Technically, you can play the heck out of these games and never pay a cent, but since karma is a boomerang, we urge you to ante up. Just download the executable files, check out the games, and then follow the directions to deliver some dough to the developer when the trial period is up.



[www.popcap.com](http://www.popcap.com)

Our latest addition from the lord of all things shareware is *Pixelus Deluxe*, a tile-shooting puzzler that has you restoring colorful ancient Greek mosaics. It's a little hard to describe, but good luck stopping once you start this or any PopCap game.

[www.rtssoft.com/dacroll/index.shtml](http://www.rtssoft.com/dacroll/index.shtml)

Filling a void in the lives of role-playing word fetishists the world over, *Dungeon Scroll* has you using *Scrabble*-style tiles to build words to get points that damage a parade of traditional dungeon dwellers. Special tiles add power to your "spells" to help you work your way deeper into the dungeon.



Pixelus Deluxe

[www.puzzlepirates.com](http://www.puzzlepirates.com)

It's no surprise that the *Tetris*, *Bejeweled*, etc. clones work in a Web environment, what's surprising is how they're woven into this charming and surprisingly deep puzzle-based pirate MMO.

[www.wikigame.com](http://www.wikigame.com)

More a cousin of Gollum than a cuddly hero, Wik bounds through the tangled woods of this platformer, snaring grubs with his long sticky tongue and spitting them out at his pal Slotham. This game treats us to the best graphics of any shareware title we've seen.

[www.sigma-team.net](http://www.sigma-team.net)

We now officially give up lamenting the end of the *Crusader* franchise. Why? Because of *Alien Shooter*, a blood-soaked little killing machine that captures the nonstop lethality of our all-time favorite third-person action game.

[www.dlvogames.com](http://www.dlvogames.com)

*Air Strike 3D: Operation WAT* is little more than a full-on arcade helicopter rail shooter—but it's an outstanding full-on arcade helicopter rail shooter.



Air Strike 3D



Dungeon Scroll



Alien Shooter

[www.justinflatspace.com](http://www.justinflatspace.com)

In *Flatspace*'s universe, the universe is, uh-huh, flat, not 3D, so all your hyperspace travel plays out on a vast plane. This is no interstellar cakewalk, but the rewards are there for the gamers who stick with it.

[www.digital-eel.com](http://www.digital-eel.com)

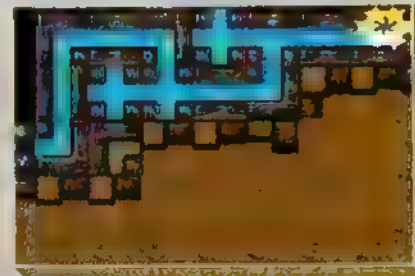
Quite possibly the world's first petri-dish shooter, *Dr. Blob's Organism* is a fun little shooter with a novel twist, some decent music, and a slew of power-ups.

[www.lobstersoft.com/3dorris](http://www.lobstersoft.com/3dorris)

Between *Checkers* and *Go* lurks *3D Morris*, a deceptively challenging little tile game with some crackerjack A.I. Every time a competitor lines up three pieces on the oddly designed board, his opponent loses a tile. The last man standing wins. Simple to learn, hard to master, and tough to stop playing.

[www.purplenose.com](http://www.purplenose.com)

Reminiscent of *Pipe Dream*, *Plummit* tasks players with laying plumbing pipes from a tap to a sink. The gameplay and graphics are pretty basic, but the challenges aren't—even the tutorials for this action-puzzler can cause you trouble.



Plummit

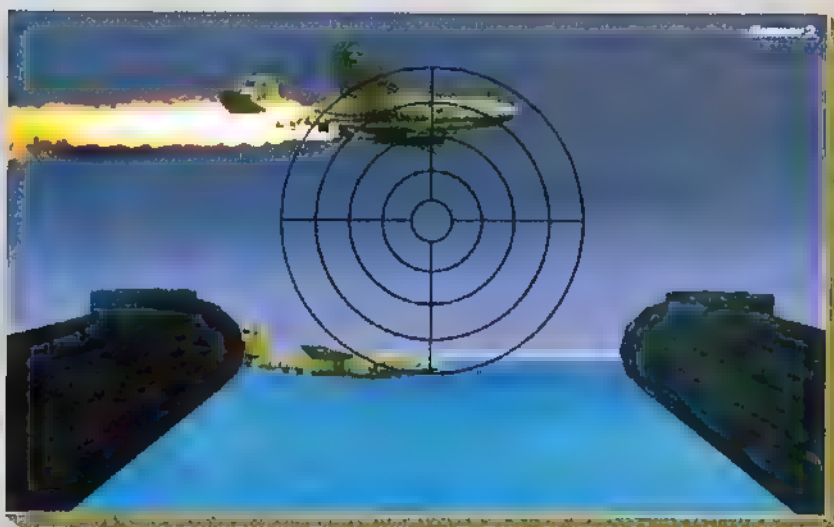




## Plasmaworm

www.digital-eel.com

Guide your plodding annelid through a convoluted playfield, gobbling up objects like French horns, kittens, and gamepads as you go. Every item eaten slaps some more proglottids onto the worm, making it harder to avoid touching the lethal walls.



but there's something hypnotic about this *Bejeweled*-style action-puzzler that has you popping multicolored bubbles

## Crazy Lunch

www.sloma-team.net

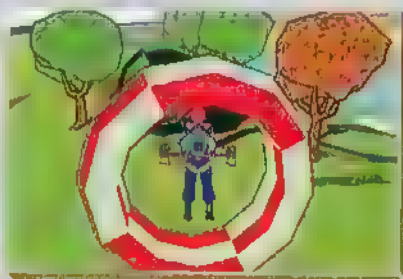
All you have to do is protect your lunch from being stolen by little grem-lins. All you do is click on them—like mad. Yeah, it's incredibly simple, and you know what? It's also way more fun than it should be.



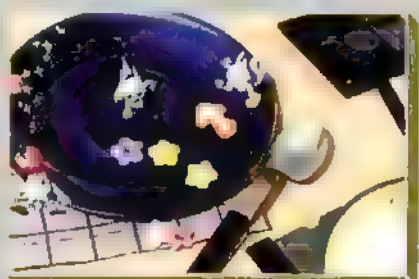
Dr. Blob's Organism



Hamsterball



Aerial Antics



Crazy Lunch

www.bigfishgames.com

The Big Fish Games website has lots of shareware games available for download.

## Gray area of free games

Resident previous-ninja and actual real-life-ninja Ryan Scott spends far too much of his free time tinkering with old, forgotten games instead of playing the recent and highly anticipated stuff. Here are a few of his favorite emulation programs. Just don't ask where to find games that work with these emulators (since that's the part that kind of skirts the edge of, y'know, legality).

### DOSBox

http://dosbox.sourceforge.net/

Bummed Windows XP has no backward compatibility with DOS games? DOSBox is the answer. From *King's Quest IV* to *Crusader*, this program accurately emulates everything from music to game speed.

### MAME

http://www.mame.net

Everybody's favorite Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator is still going as strong as ever, with support for hundreds of classic arcade hits ranging from *R-Type* and *Joust* to *Beatmania* and *Soul Calibur*.

### Kawaks

http://kawaks.retrogames.com/



Kawaks is a stable and functional emulator for arcade games that utilize

Capcom's classic CPS-1 and CPS-2 architectures, such as *Street Fighter II* and *D&D: Shadow Over Mystara*. It's also handy for emulating classic NeoGeo titles like *Samurai Shodown II*. And it even includes multiplayer network support!

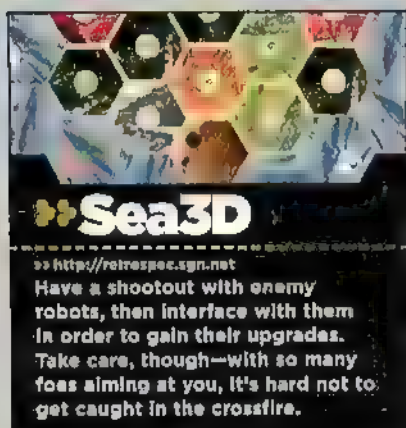
### MagicEngine

www.magicengine.com/



Not too many people remember the TurboGrafx-16 console

(aka the PC Engine overseas), but it had some real gems that were never released here, most notably *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood*. This inexpensive and near-perfect emulator gives you the chance to finally experience these hits.



## Sea3D

» <http://retrospec.sgn.net>

Have a shootout with enemy robots, then interface with them in order to gain their upgrades. Take care, though—with so many foes aiming at you, it's hard not to get caught in the crossfire.

[www.warlockstudios.com](http://www.warlockstudios.com)

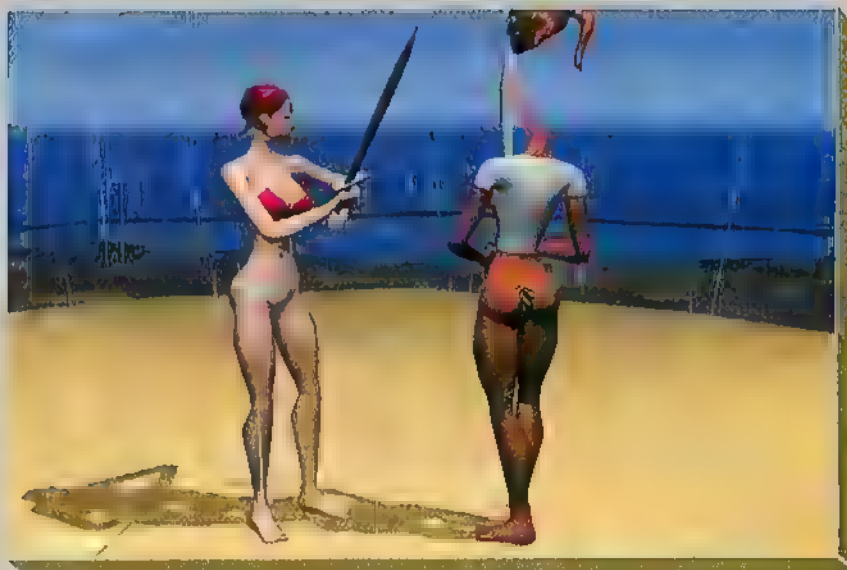
*Gunner 2* is like the anti-aircraft and tank-gunner sections of *Call of Duty: United Offensive*, without the sexy graphics. You man a variety of big guns on land, sea, and air, protecting your allies from enemy aircraft.

[www.leadfootproductions.com](http://www.leadfootproductions.com)

In the future, we will all commute to work with personal jetpacks. In the meantime, we'll have to settle for *Aerial Antics*. Do you have what it takes to be an aerial cir-



Chain Reaction



cus performer in the future?

<http://www.garagegames.com/pg/browse.php>

One seriously unique and fun game, this take on the 2D side-scroller has players guiding an amoeba-like being through an assortment of underground environments.

[www.brivultree.com](http://www.brivultree.com)

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. So why not perform a little psychosurgery and jam a brain inside a tank?

[www.garagegames.com/pg/browse.php](http://www.garagegames.com/pg/browse.php)

Satisfy your inner Rube Goldberg with *Chain Reaction*, a 3D reimagining of the classic *Incredible Machine*. Your job is to move a little monster on a cart from point A to point Z via convoluted jerry-rigged machines using basketballs, fans, gravity,

monsters in boxes, and more.

[www.bul.twang.com](http://www.bul.twang.com)

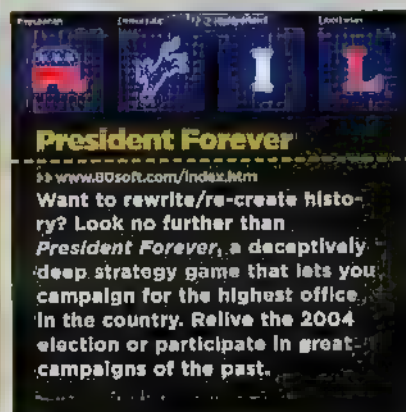
When the intergalactic aliens come to enslave and devour mankind, someone is sure to cry out in anguish, "Why?" This is why. Digital big-breasted, scantily clad, sword-fighting amazons. Finally, gratuitous cleavage and bloody decapitation in one embarrassing package. Suddenly, *Bilimi Karate Babes* seems almost respectable.

[www.wizards.com/n/default.asp?nt=maric/magiconline](http://www.wizards.com/n/default.asp?nt=maric/magiconline)

This scaled-down version of the popular card game lets you play in simple matches, tournaments, and multiplayer games, a bit with a fairly limited deck. New virtual cards are available at real-world, real-card prices.

[www.starchamber.net](http://www.starchamber.net)

Want to play a collectible card game but have an aversion to elves? *Star Chamber* offers a unique spin on the genre.



## President Forever

» [www.BUsoft.com/index.htm](http://www.BUsoft.com/index.htm)

Want to rewrite/re-create history? Look no further than *President Forever*, a deceptively deep strategy game that lets you campaign for the highest office in the country. Relive the 2004 election or participate in great campaigns of the past.





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# FREE TO ADD ON



BATTLEFIELD 1942

## Desert Combat

>> [www.desertcombat.com/](http://www.desertcombat.com/)  
This mod, set in the Middle East, continues to be wildly popular among *BF1942* players. It's maintained by a dedicated team of programmers and artists who recently released the final full-featured version to the public.

## Empires

>> [www.empiresmod.com/](http://www.empiresmod.com/)  
This mod fuses the *BF1942* experience with the tactical gameplay of real-time strategy games, giving you the option to expand your base with extra vehicles and buildings as you contest with enemy teams for valuable resources.



You probably already own *Battlefield Vietnam*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, and *Neverwinter Nights*—and you've probably already played through them all. Breathe new life into them with these free mods. Just download the executable files and install them on the computer where the original games are living. Oh, you'll probably notice the ton of *Unreal Tournament* mods on this list. Why? The "Make Something Unreal" contest dangled some serious money in front of mod makers—and lined us up with lots of great game tweaks.

## BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

### BattleGroup Vietnam

>> [www.battlegroup42.com/](http://www.battlegroup42.com/)

This Vietnam conversion of BattleGroup42's *BattleGroup 1942* mod aims to bring more realism to the game, with historically accurate equipment and much more attention to detail across all the game's weapons, vehicles, and maps.

### BushWar

>> <http://bushwar.unl.cc/>

It's the Cuban army versus the South African Defense Fund in *BushWar*, a total-conversion mod set in South Africa and Angola during the 1970s. It features all-new maps, as well as additional weapons and vehicles compatible with the existing *Battlefield Vietnam* maps.

### Insurrection 1776

>> [www.planetbattlefield.com/insurrection/](http://www.planetbattlefield.com/insurrection/)

*Insurrection 1776* is a Revolutionary War-style mod for *Battlefield Vietnam*. It's still pretty early in development, but it is set to feature new weapons, the ability to bandage wounds, and several new weapons and classes—including an officer class that commands three to six NPC units.

### Point of Existence

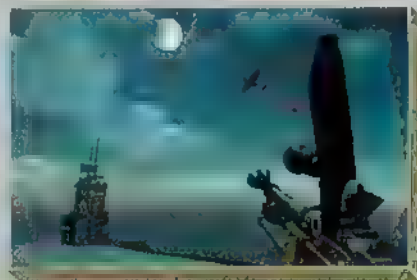
>> [www.pointofexistence.com/](http://www.pointofexistence.com/)

Forget Vietnam—*Point of Existence* brings the fight into the modern day, pitting the United States against Russia in a struggle for resources. This *Battlefield Vietnam* mod features new automatic weapons, vehicles, and aircraft.

### World War II Modification

>> <http://bfvietnam.ca.com/>

Want to relive the glory days of *Battlefield 1942*? This official mod from EA Games and Digital Illusions updates three classic maps from *BF 1942*, taking full advantage of the more robust Vietnam engine.



## CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS

### Rise and Rule

>> <http://civ3.bernakov.com/RnR/>

Variety is the spice of life in this massive modification for the *Conquests* expansion. It introduces 340 new units, 200 technology upgrades, and enough bells and whistles to keep you busy for a long, long time.

## COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

### Battletech: The Capellan Solution

>> [www.battletechmodproductions.com/btgenerals/](http://www.battletechmodproductions.com/btgenerals/)

Do you miss the *MechCommander* games? *C&C Generals* meets *Battletech* in this total-conversion mod that brings the military RTS into the realm of futuristic battle mechs. The single-player campaign sports a solid story involving three warring clans and features plenty of changes to the typical *Generals* mechanics.

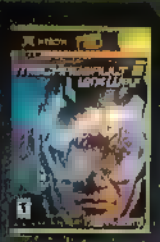
### SecondWave

>> <http://102troopgames.1UP.com>

This *C&C Generals* mod brings plenty of new options to the table, including a new side to play as, 30 new units, and several additional maps for skirmish and multi-player modes.



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[www.mechassault2.com](http://www.mechassault2.com)

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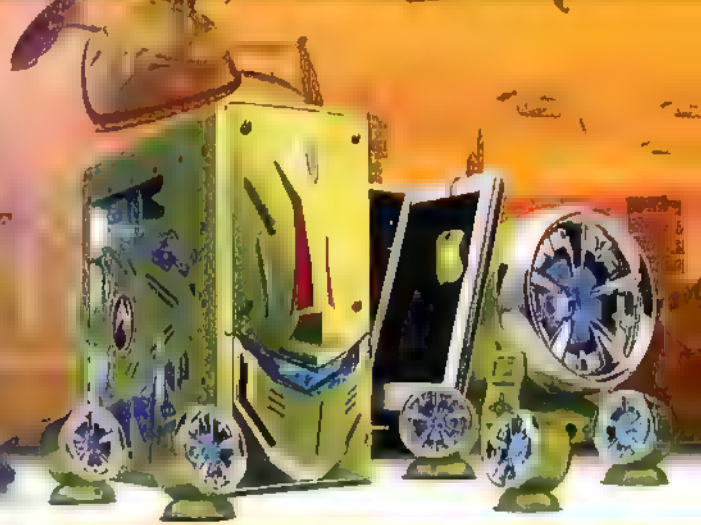


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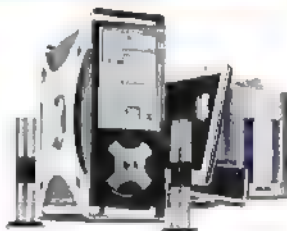
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## Zero Hour Reborn: Rise to Power

>> <http://102freegames.1UP.com>

If you own the *Zero Hour* expansion pack for *C&C Generals*, check out *Rise to Power*, which rebalances the gameplay and adds new music, loading screens, and cinematic sequences.

## DOOM 3

### 32-Player Multiplayer

>> <http://ustb.0.do/d3.html>

Multiplayer is a great thing—and for *Doom 3*, four players just ain't enough! With this mod, up to 32 players can connect to a server, making for an even more chaotic demon-killing gorefest.

### Duct Tape

>> <http://ducttape.glenmurphy.com/>

If you're anything like us, *Doom 3* has instilled a new fear of the dark in you. This handy mod grafts a flashlight to your weapon in exchange for a slightly narrower cone of light.

### Hello Kitty Flashlight

>> <http://102freegames.1UP.com>

Need a night-light? There are a variety of wacky flashlight modifications available for *Doom 3*, including the Batman logo, the Thundercats logo, and—our personal favorite—Hello Kitty.

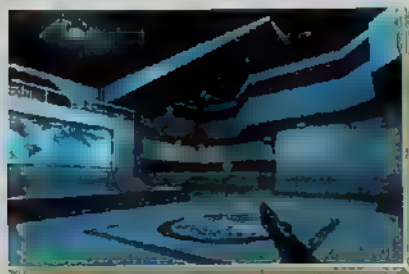
### Nitro Gore

>> [www.nitroclan.de/](http://www.nitroclan.de/)

*Doom 3* doesn't exactly skimp on the vile and disgusting carnage, but if for some reason you just can't get enough of it, this mod will ensure that you're swimming in blood and guts the whole way through Yummy!



▲ Nitro Gore



▲ The Beginning

## DUNGEON SIEGE

### Copperhead: Retaliation

>> [www.glenscopperhead.com/](http://www.glenscopperhead.com/)

If you ask us, medieval stuff is way overrated. With *Copperhead: Retaliation*, *Dungeon Siege* goes from the Dark Ages to the space age. This mod features a new sci-fi story, as well as original enemies, weapons, and locations.

### Elemental

>> [www.the-slemmental.net/](http://www.the-slemmental.net/)

This total conversion presents *Dungeon Siege* fans with a so-called Biblepunk setting—a mythical, gritty version of ancient Judea. We don't know much about history, but this is one of the weirder "alternate timeline" ideas we've come across.

▲ Copperhead Retaliation

## FAR CRY

### Far Cry Co-op: Together Through Calamity

>> [www.frcrycoop.de/vu](http://www.frcrycoop.de/vu)

The multiplayer addition is great—especially for those who can't handle going it alone. With this mod, up to three players can take on the single-player missions simultaneously. After you've gotten your fill of *Far Cry*'s solo mode, try this multiplayer patch.

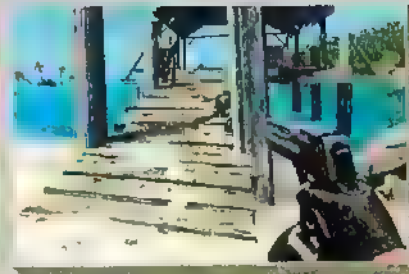
## GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



### GTA: Liberty City

>> <http://102freegames.1UP.com>

Take a trip back...to Liberty City! This total conversion mod re-creates *GTA3*'s Liberty City in the *Vice City* engine, making for improved vehicle physics and smoother, faster-running gameplay—not to mention motorcycles and helicopters.



▲ Far Cry co-op

### Multi Theft Auto

>> [www.multitheftauto.com/](http://www.multitheftauto.com/)

We're still waiting for Rockstar to make *GTA Online*, but this is the next best thing. With *Multi Theft Auto*, you and your friends can square off in citywide gang wars and deathmatches. It even has some new cars and an improved aiming system!

### Ultimate Vice City

>> [www.ultimategta.com/](http://www.ultimategta.com/)

Bored with *Vice City*? This mod adds several additional buildings and landmarks to the game, as well as a whopping 40 brand-new cars and motorcycles for your car-jacking pleasure.



▲ Crazy Lunch





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© Half-Life

## HALF-LIFE

### The Beginning

>> [www.hltb.co.uk/](http://www.hltb.co.uk/)

*The Beginning* is an objective-oriented multiplayer modification for the original *Half-Life*. It features squad-based gameplay, two distinct teams to choose from, 12 new weapons, and tons of graphical upgrades.

### Counter-Strike 2D

>> <http://102freegames.tup.com>

This total-conversion mod transforms *Counter-Strike* into a top-down 2D action-shooter. Fans of games such as *Crimsonland* should definitely appreciate this cool little throwback to simpler times.



### Mech Mod

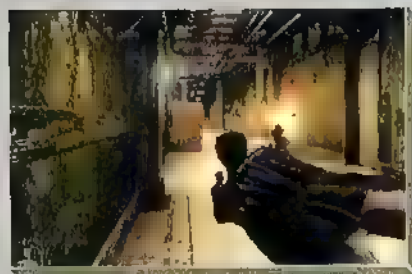
>> [www.mechmod.com/](http://www.mechmod.com/)

This *Half-Life* mod puts you in control of giant war robots armed with lasers and nuclear missiles.

### Project: Timeless

>> [www.project-timeless.de](http://www.project-timeless.de)

This multiplayer 3D first-person shooter pits man against machine in the not-too-distant *Half-Life* future.



© Project: Timeless

## MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

### Battle Tactics 2

>> <http://battle tactics.maxpayneheadquarters.com/>

*Battle Tactics 2* turns *Max Payne 2* into a turn-based strategy game in which you'll match wits with the enemy A.I. as you work to escort hostages to safety. There's even a bonus Dead Man Walking level for the truly hardcore.

### Matrix Edition

>> <http://102freegames.tup.com>

If there's one game that out-Matrixes *Enter the Matrix*, it's *Max Payne 2*. This mod takes it a few steps further, giving you an infinite bullet-time meter, some beefy new weapons, and some new music to rock out with.

## NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

### Tomb of Horrors

>> <http://www.vault.tgn.com/Files/modules/data/1084>

Based on a classic *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* module, this adventure is built for high-level characters. You may need both expansions to play this module, but it's worth it. Just consider yourself warned. With a name like *The Tomb of Horrors*, don't expect it to be a cakewalk.

## RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

### DeGeneration

>> [www.planetwolfenstein.com/transdesign/degeneration/index.html](http://www.planetwolfenstein.com/transdesign/degeneration/index.html)

This team-based mod has you and your opponents racing to create your own WMDs. It's part *Junkyard Wars* as you race to the drop zone, where you grab and assemble pieces of a giant death ray. Yes, we know: a giant death ray.



© Call to Arms



### Samurai Wars

>> <http://samuraiwars.savageeuropa.com>

The ambitious hybrid game *Savage* received a lukewarm reception despite blending the RTS and FPS genres. This mod takes the battle to feudal Japan with all new units and structures.

## UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

### The Crystal Element

>> [www.crystalelement.tk/](http://www.crystalelement.tk/)

Here's something that should humble just about every game developer out there. This mod of *Unreal II* is a school project. It's not actually finished yet, but even as is, it brings cool, console-ish RPG platforming to the PC that's better than some full-priced stuff we've seen.

## UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

### Action UT

>> [www.actionproductions.net](http://www.actionproductions.net)

Take all of *UT*'s first-person action and slam it into what you'd expect to see in an action movie. That, in a nutshell, is what *Action UT* is all about.

### Anomaly

>> [www.anomaly-taction.com/](http://www.anomaly-taction.com/)

We are unabashed speed junkies, but there are few games like *F-Zero* or *WipeOut* on the PC. Thankfully, the guys working on *Anomaly* also feel that need for speed.

### Alien Swarm

>> [www.blackcatgames.com/swarm](http://www.blackcatgames.com/swarm)

We love the *Alien* movies and top-down tactical games. Put the two together and you've

SAVAGE BATTLE FOR NEWERTH





"With this new action-adventure Scrapland, American McGee is well on his way to becoming the PC-gaming equivalent of Alfred Hitchcock..."

"He's stamping his brand on the game: quirky and original."

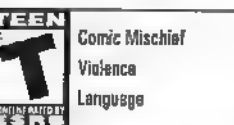
**-PC Gamer**

"...combine the open-ended exploration of Grand Theft Auto with fast-paced online and offline racing and shooting."

**-GameSpot**

"Scrapland is destined to become one of this years most entertaining and refreshing games."

**-Game Chronicles Magazine**





UnWheel

got an addictive mod in which you control a team of four specialists. In fact, it looks so slick, we'd probably pay for it if we had to.

### Call to Arms

Why wait for games like *Dungeon Lords* when you can get your hands on a fantasy-fueled total conversion for *UT*? This action-RPG has a point-and-click interface and a fairly interactive environment to explore. Not bad for two brothers programming in their spare time, eh?

### Clone Bandits

There's no way to sum up this postapocalyptic FPS mod. But some cool, creative vehicles are yours to control, and the goal is to seize the clone pumps on each map depleting the enemy's supply.

### Damnation

Part third-person platformer, part FPS, this steampunk adventure is a trip. There's a cool variety of powers and characters to choose from, and weapons like a steam-billowing gun and mechanized 24-shooters. Six-shooters are so 1860!

### DeathBall

It's a combination of football, soccer, and all-out war! This 5-on-5 title is one of Clifly B's favorites—and for good reason. Down load it!

### Field of Fire

This mod is all about carjacking, firepower, and sneakery on an onslaught-inspired map. The goal: Destroy the enemy base. Creep stealthily through the environment and blend in with the civilians, or just roll in with a tank and finish the job.

### LawDogs

Nobody escapes the long arm of the law, ya yella-bellied polecats. This wild Western mod packs 20-some-odd maps, authentic weapons, a bunch of character types—and even a horse you can ride into town on.

### Muralis

Arena melee combat is the name of this game, inspired by fighting games. *Muralis* incorporates combo moves, stun maneuvers, and team-based combat.

### Piddly's Chance

A surreal mutation of the Unreal engine *Piddly's Chance* is a platformer that pays tribute to classic console games. *Metal Gear Solid* references? Check. *Frogger* levels? Yep. *Mario*-esque platforming? Of course. Should you download it? No doubt.

### Robin Hood and the King's Ransom

This is one crazy-looking third-person adventure game. With random humor and sweet cel-shaded graphics, this feels more like it belongs on a console. But we are definitely not complaining.

### Red Orchestra

Imagine if *Battlefield 1942* actually looked good. Focusing on Russia's role in World War II, this total-conversion mod is huge—and a great war gamer's mod. Realistic

environments, detailed models, great sound; the fact that this is a free download seems almost criminal.

### Strike Force 2004

Boy, people sure can't get enough of this terrorist versus counterterrorist squad-based combat. Cue *Strike Force*. Over the years, it's gone through revisions with each new game engine that comes along, and it just keeps getting better.

### Suburbs

Hey, playal! Wanna live the gangsta lifestyle but too much of a dork to do it in public? Download this mod instead. Taking place in the fictional *Pacific*, this game borrows a page from *GTA* and lets you freely roam through the environment.

### UnWheel

*UnWheel* turns *Unreal* into a conventional racing sim with real vehicles. This amazing-looking mod has lots of vehicles (ranging from conventional racers and off-roaders to Centipede trucks!), race types, and tracks.

## WARCRAFT III

### The Tales of Raviganion

This mod swaps out all the original *WarCraft III* races with new ones: Wood elves replace humans, trolls replace orcs. And the undead and night elves are replaced by the forces of chaos and swamp dwellers, respectively. Needs *The Frozen Throne* expands on.

### Where'd We Find This Stuff?

Check out these sites—they're packed to the gills with free stuff!

[www.reflexive.net/](http://www.reflexive.net/)  
[www.digital-aal.com](http://www.digital-aal.com)  
[www.garagegames.com/](http://www.garagegames.com/)  
[www.gamhippa.com](http://www.gamhippa.com)

## But Goodies

Yeah, we've already mentioned these before—but we still love 'em enough to recommend them again.

### America's Army

[www.americasarmy.com/](http://www.americasarmy.com/)



This U.S. Army-designed game is still free, and still great. An excellent team-based multiplayer FPS that's constantly updated and improved to accommodate more than 4 million players.

### Crimsonland

[www.crimsonland.com/](http://www.crimsonland.com/)



It hasn't been updated much in the past year, but *Crimsonland* is still one of our favorite action games. We hear a rumor that Reflexive might be revisiting this game soon. We hope so!

### Mutant Storm

[www.gam-pamgames.com/](http://www.gam-pamgames.com/)

A multilevel 3D



action game inspired by classic shoot-'em-ups, *Mutant Storm* is one of those games that satisfies the *Gradius* fan in all of us.



### Steel Panthers: World at War

[www.steelpanthersworldatwar.com/](http://www.steelpanthersworldatwar.com/)

*Steel Panthers* has been a favorite download among war gamers since its initial release. The latest version has improved sound effects

graphics, unit selection, and enemy A.I.

### Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

[www.aplashdamage.com/](http://www.aplashdamage.com/)



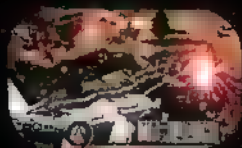
This free 32-player expansion pack for *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*

showcases several additional character options and takes players through a new campaign. It's still a great value for owners of the original game!

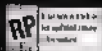


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**ACT OF WAR**  
DIRECT ACTION



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# WHAT IS THE MATRIX ONLINE?

**AND HOW ARE THE GAME DESIGNERS GOING TO MAKE US CARE?**

BY JEFF GREEN





PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and Sega  
DEVELOPER: Monolith Productions  
GENRE: Massively multiplayer online roleplaying game



**Why should we believe? Why should we take the red pill? Why should we do what Monolith Productions and Warner Bros. want us to do and jack into the Matrix once again? Didn't we already suffer through one mediocre PC game? Weren't the second and third movies, despite making hundreds of millions of dollars, major disappointments that turned lots of people off of the franchise? And don't we already have too many cool online games to play anyway?**



Is commuting to work less depressing if you know it isn't real?

**T**hese are just some of the tough questions facing the developers of *The Matrix Online*, a massively multi-player online RPG set in the *Matrix* universe, now due to launch on January 18. And while no one knows how it's ultimately going to pan out, we can tell you this after spending some time with the game: It's a crazy, ambitious, and potentially groundbreaking project.

That's no hyperbole. When the game goes live, the *Matrix* story line will legitimately continue, as told directly by the movies' master minds, the Wachowski brothers. And that might be a first. While plenty of movie franchises become computer games, they usually either just rehash the movies or exist as alternate story lines that don't directly affect the movies or the main characters. In this case, however, *The Matrix Online* is essentially the "fourth movie"—continuing right where *The Matrix Revolutions* left off, featuring all the major characters, voiced by all the original actors, in the official

story that the Wachowskis are not done telling yet. The only difference? Now you get to be part of that story, too.

If this is a gamble for the Wachowskis, it's an even bigger one for the game's developer, Monolith Productions, which until now has made only relatively small single-player-focused games (*No One Lives Forever*, *Tron 2.0*) and which now finds itself with the gargantuan 24/7 migraine that is an MMORPG—one that's up against giants like *EverQuest II* and *World of Warcraft*; no less.

### History lesson

How *The Matrix Online* came to be is a story that could consume this entire magazine, but here's the short version. Back in 2001, with the first movie out and the next two beginning production, Monolith, anxious to enter the burgeoning MMO market, pitched the online game to the Wachowskis, who immediately saw in Monolith a way to realize their bigger goals for the franchise. ☐







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**GUILD WARS**



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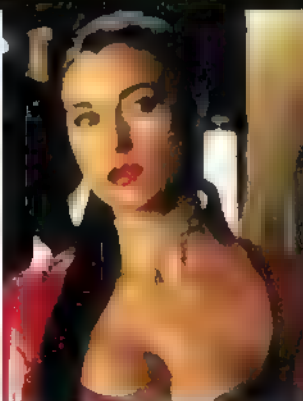
The entire game takes place within the Matrix itself. The "real world" is out there, but you'll never see it.

# FIVE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE MATRIX

**1** Both Will Smith and Ewan McGregor turned down the role of Neo (Will Smith passed so he could star in *Wild, Wild West*—doh!). Val Kilmer was considered for the role of Morpheus. And Jet Li turned down the role of Seraph.

**2** The most successful movie of the trilogy is *The Matrix Reloaded*, which grossed over \$281 million and is the 24th all-time U.S. box office hit. *The Matrix* came in second, making over \$171 million and ranking No. 89 on the all-time list. *The Matrix Revolutions* came in at \$139 million and 145th on the list—just above *The Santa Clause 2*.

**3** Monica Bellucci's character, the A.I. construct Persephone, is a program created to get males to, um, produce reproductive cells in the batteries.



**4** The two window washers seen early on in *The Matrix* as Neo runs from the agents are played by the Wachowski brothers in a rare public appearance.

**5** The Merovingians were a Frankish dynasty that first appeared around the fifth century and are considered to be the first French royals. That's why that doofus has a French accent in the movie.



**6** You'll learn long jumps, but forget about flying. Only Neo does that.

"The brothers had a very specific idea about what they wanted to do," says Toby Ragaini, the game's lead designer at Monolith. "They wanted to continue to tell the *Matrix* story—not just have gamers 'relive' the movies. So our proposal showed how they could continue the story in an online game—and they were very receptive. The Wachowskis are gamers, so they understood the peculiarities of MMORPGs—that no one could play as Neo or Morpheus, for example. They were game-savvy and their ideas were very much in sync with the game we wanted to make."

Once they had a deal, Ragaini and CEO Jason Hall (who jumped from Monolith to Warner Bros. to oversee the project during its development) were brought in to read the top-secret scripts of the second and third movies—printed on maroon paper with black ink to prevent photocopying—long before filming had even begun.

"From the very beginning," says Ragaini, "we were brought into the process of the movies and how it was going to affect the game we were making. Because *The Matrix Online* takes place





All player characters are "Redpills" who jack into the Matrix to ally with the forces of Zion, the machines, or the other.

after *Revolutions*, it was important that we were able to understand the implications of the movies."

Since then, Monolith has been working with acclaimed comic book writer Paul Chadwick (*Concrete*), who was handpicked by the Wachowskis to map out the game's story through both cinematics and player missions (see sidebar). The cinematics are going to be presented to all players—no matter where they are in the game, as episodic updates—cutscenes designed to present important, world-changing events. When the world changes—that is, when the Wachowskis lay out another plot point—it changes for good, across all the game's servers, for all players.

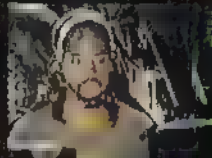
### Jacking In

And this is, of course, a game—not a movie. So who are you, and what do you get to do?

The beginning of your experience in *The Matrix Online* mirrors Neo's in the first movie: You take the red pill and are "awakened" to the fact that your life until now has been an illusion. You've been released from imprisonment in the pods and are now jacking into the Matrix with other "Redpills" in the real world. Though events are indeed happening in the real world, you'll never see that world yourself: The entire gameplay experience takes place within the Matrix. Every time you log into the game you are, in fact, jacking into the Matrix.

"It's a very convenient metaphor," Ragani explains, "because every other MMO has to deal with the question of why are people magically entering and exiting the world at various points? In *The Matrix*, it's very clear. Part of the exploration element in the game, in fact, is finding access to more hard lines. So initially, you have a very limited set of hard lines that you can enter the world in, but as you explore, you have more and more log-in points."

Though you can only play as a human, you can ally with any of the three warring factions still jockeying for control and power within the post-*Revolutions* Matrix: the machines, the exiles (rogue A.I. programs, like the Merovingian), or the human rebels of Zion. "We're not telling players there's a good side and bad side," says Ragani. "It's which side do you believe? Whose propa-



### WHO WILL DIE

by the Wachowskis, the game's story is a continuation of the

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ganda makes the most sense to you?" For the humans, the pitch is obvious: Redpills must continue to free people, to release them from their pods. The machines cannot be trusted to maintain the truce Neo achieved in *Revolutions*.

The machines, on the other hand, will try to recruit you—because, after Neo, they realize that some humans can be of use to them. William Westwater, the game's producer at Monolith, puts the machines' propaganda this way: "The machines can say to players, in a very realistic way, 'How can you possibly trust your own leaders? They're driven by ego and greed and

## "The machines can say to players, in a very realistic way, 'How can you possibly trust your own leaders?'"

emotions that we don't feel at all. We successfully kept humanity alive and provided what would have been a complete Eden from the reality of your perception. Let us continue to shepherd you and work with us to keep the people of Zion from breaking this thing into pieces."

Finally, there are the exiles, machine programs that have rejected their heritage and are hiding out in the Matrix to indulge in the extremes of human behavior—without feeling any of the normal limitations of humans. They accept the simulation but are not restricted by it. They are the "Greek gods" of the game, and they have their own reasons to ally with the humans—and that will be a tempting way to go for many players.

### I know kung fu

As with everything involving the *Matrix*, one could theorize all day—but obviously what matters most here is the gameplay. Character development will follow the typical mechanics of taking on missions, both solo and in groups (which will vary, obviously, depending on your alignment)

and using the skills you specialize in to gain power and prestige.

A great deal of the action is, of course, combat based—and, as befits the franchise, it is mostly centered around martial arts and firearms. The combat looks

and feels unlike that in any other MMORPG. Players choose and line up moves and countermoves in an action bar, and then each move is weighed against the opponent's on a round-by-round basis—something like a real-time *Magic: The Gathering* game system. It's a system that, we will say, still feels wonky in the beta, but it may offer a fresh take on what has become a largely dull and standardized mechanic.

Players do not choose one specific class, but instead follow different ability trees to customize their experience. You can, for example, learn hacking skills, which function largely as buffs and debuffs in combat, but also allow you to tap into data nodes to gain information (the game's currency) to trade with other players. You can also learn spy abilities, which will enable you to do things like disable security systems, assume disguises, and perform sneak attacks. ■

## HEY NEO, U THERE? BRB! LOL!!

One cool innovation in *The Matrix Online* is that players can send instant messages from within the game to friends logged on to AIM or ICQ, whether or not those friends are in the game. You can create a game-specific AIM account with your character's name, so any message you send out will be sent with that name. Likewise, you could open up your AIM client when not logged on and still get messages from players in the game. Using the AIM 9.0 client, you could, if you wanted, link your regular and game AIM accounts together: Matrix friends would still only send and receive messages to your in-game character name, while everyone in the real world would see the real you. Uh, if this is the real world, that is. Hey, how come that spoon is bending?

## INTERVIEW WITH PAUL CHADWICK



Acclaimed comic-book writer Paul Chadwick (*Concrete*) has been involved with *The Matrix* since first creating comics for the *Matrix* website back in 1999; he now collaborates with the Wachowskis on *The Matrix Online*. And he illustrated the cover of the CGW that's in your hands right now.

learn on missions, in gameplay, from rumors, and by exploring the world. And Chadwick was one of the first to write the text for the in-game newspaper, *The Sentinel*.

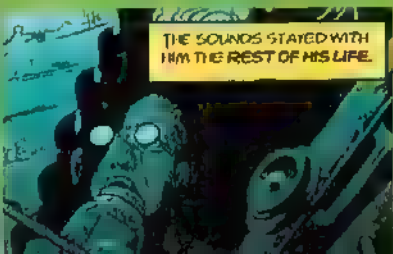
**CGW:** Why work on this series at all? What was your motivation for getting involved?

**PC:** I was flattered, honestly. Rarely in the movie business do you find powerful creators who command such loyalty and respect from the troops. If I may quote such an unble personage as Norman Rockwell, "Genius is the capacity to take infinite pains." That describes the *Matrix* team, once I saw the game in its embryonic state at Monolith. I was impressed again. The game and world designers are very sharp people. I like being part of the team.

**CGW:** What specifically is your involvement in *The Matrix Online*?

**Paul Chadwick:** I write the global story—events that happen to major characters that survived from the films, and the *Matrix* as a whole. I storyboard the cinematics that illustrate this and write the web site outline, detailing things players must

the reception to them!







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## Heroes and villains

What the design team feels most proud of is how your individual moments in missions might conceivably impact the entire game world around you. "History is made of the great names, and for an online community the same thing is true," Ragaini says.

"We might have a story line, where, say, and this is just an example, Neo would be resurrected and killed again by a player—but only one player per server would really be able to do that. That moment would be recorded and remembered. Now how cool would it be to be that guy?"

Players can become the heroes of individual story arcs, and because of the episodic way these story arcs will unroll, you'll see the aftermath of events. You'll be able to see how specific players defeated an opponent and how that allowed another event to happen; your effect on the world is a tangible one.

"Players will determine how fast or how slow certain events happen," says Ragaini. "If people pull together and work really hard, they might make something happen soon, whereas if they are reluctant or if there's resistance, it might take a very long time. The track is being put out in front of the players, but they determine how fast that track is put down."

All the innovative storytelling by the Wachowskis and Paul Chadwick, all of the cool tie-ins to the movies, won't mean anything if *The Matrix Online* is not fun to play—and everyone on the project seems



to get that notion.

"Monolith set out to make a fun game—period," says Jason Hall, "whether the game was *The Matrix* or not. All of the design and energy went into what made the game fun and unique in its own right, regardless of the movie franchise. Monolith has a reputation it's worked hard to build—the company doesn't want this to just be a 'licensed product'—it needs to be a legitimately great game."

And what about those of us who had jacked out, who had had enough of the *Matrix* after the second two movies?

"We're going to win you back over," promises Hall. "That feeling of newness and exploration and mystery that you got in the first film is what we're hearkening



back to in *The Matrix Online*. You're going to want to know what happens."

A breakthrough in digital entertainment, or noble failure? There's no way to know just yet—but we'll be taking the red pill and following that white rabbit this coming January.

ingly steps. A new character, the Architect, gives a mind-exploding, everything-you-know-is-wrong monologue with too many revelations to follow. So I love it; it gave me something I'd never seen before. *Revolutions* was perhaps too noisy, too big and fast, but hardly deserved the gut stabs so many critics dollieroed. It was a completion, and so its mystery quotient, a quality so acute in the first film, was low.

**CGW:** What is the creative process like between you and the Wachowskis on the game?

They sat me down for a long talk. They gave me a theme: Peace and the things people do to wreck it. That's for the first year. And a seed incident—a dramatic development in the lives of some principal characters. They also had ideas on what would be interesting for people to do, such as recruiting bluepills or redpill status, or, long memorandum of the meeting, then an outline, then a radically revised outline. They vetted each step, approving or

polishing to make sure we don't stray from their logic or story values, as they should. If I had created something as valuable and popular as *The Matrix*, I'd protect my baby.

**CGW:** If I loved the first movie, but not the others, why should I play this game now? How is it going to draw me back into the *Matrix*?

**PC:** Part of the first movie's allure was its paranoia, its sense of huge mysteries. I think we can recapture that. Although players now know the premise of *The Matrix*, we will surprise them with some of the twists.

**CGW:** What are some of the stories we can look forward to?

**PC:** There are plenty of stories left to tell: A *Citizen Kane*-like examination of one of the film's characters, revealing his backstory. A murder mystery. A *Matrix*-glitch reality/weather crisis that I think will blow a few minds. A story of psychopathology born of a sensitive person's awareness that the *Matrix* is unreliable; her mistaken conclusion that other people aren't real; their pain is fake. Doorways into new worlds appearing in the Megacity, worlds where physical laws are different—the implications of that. The problem of unregulated superpowers, and the corruption that follows. Persephone's obsession with love, and how it is constantly thwarted. That's just our first year. I joke that there are 8 million more stories in this naked city.

*The Matrix* isn't over, not by a long shot.

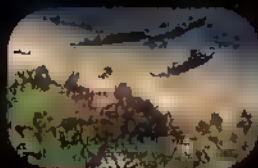


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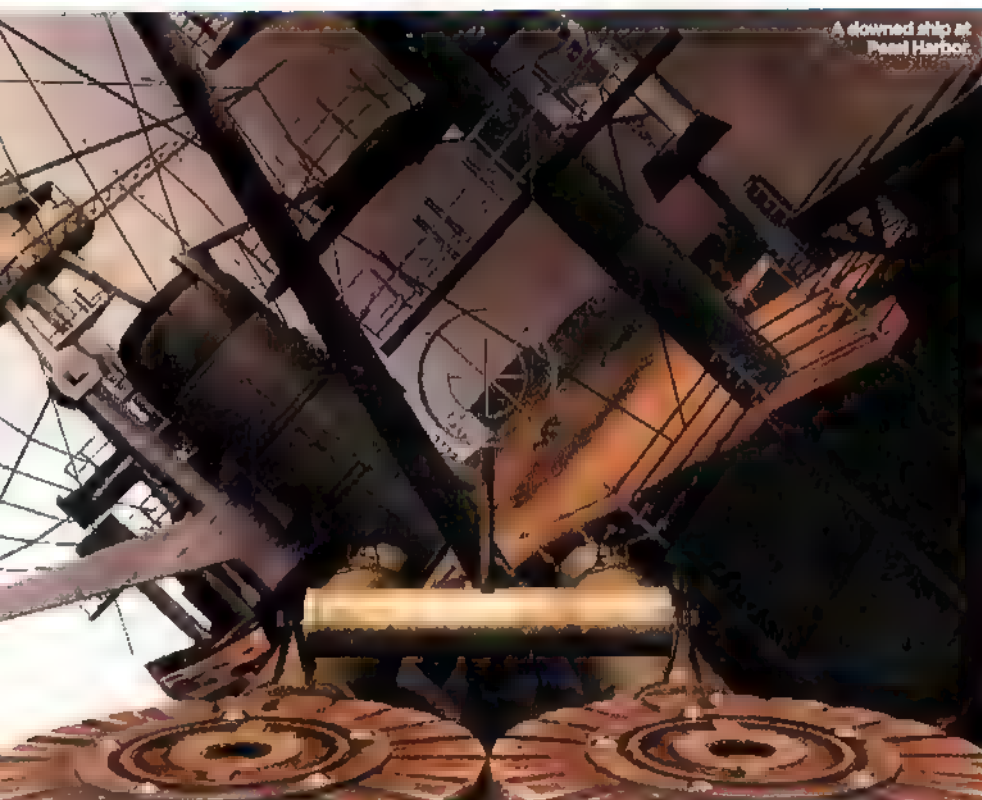
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# Reviews

The Good, the Bad, and the Mediocre



A downed ship at Pearl Harbor.



Holding the line during this night mission is one of the less thrilling parts of *Pacific Assault*.



Sleepy little villages like this are invariably crawling with the enemy. Guaranteed.



PUBLISHER: EA Games DEVELOPER: EA Games GENRE: SHOOTER ESRB RATING: T REQUIRES: Pentium 4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 4.5GB install, broadband connection for online play RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4 3GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB videocard MULTIPLE PLAYERS: Internet, LAN (2-32 players)

## Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

If only the real war had been this short



Capturing this airfield on Guadalcanal is one of the most satisfying sequences in the game.



Until you move past the event trigger in this trench, the game will keep spawning enemies and you'll keep piling them up like cordwood.





Is this Vietnam shooter from former *Medal of Honor* designers a bungle in the jungle?



A beloved turn-based board game makes the jump to real time—and falls flat on its face.



This MMO beats *EQ2* and *WOW* to shelves, but does it even matter?



Your LVT lurches through the pounding surf as bullets zip above your head. Manning the LVT's machine gun, you desperately mow down Japanese soldiers on a nearby pier even after you start taking hits. Your squad reaches the beachhead and you leap from the LVT, madly churning through the waist-deep water as bullets riddle your body. You scream for help, you search for medical aid, you scurry under the pier, and you die an ugly death, the unhappy memory of your drill sergeant's taunts ringing in your ears. You are dead. Dead, dead, dead. And there is nothing you can do.

Welcome to *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault*, the latest iteration of the gold standard in WWII shooters and possessor of what is probably the most aggravating opening in a game ever. Nothing like popping that \$50 game into your PC, only to be forced to lose within two minutes. Fortunately, this is just about the only significant misstep in a game that is generally outstanding—at least while it lasts.

## Back to basics

Turns out that untimely death was just a foreshadowing of what your character Tommy Conlon, is to face later during the conflict in the Pacific theater. Right after you die, you are whisked away back in time as you wistfully recall then plod through your prolonged and not-so-compelling basic training. This tutorial is decently handled, filling you in on the basics and introducing you to the cast of characters that will be fighting alongside you the rest of the game. Did you ever see that WWII movie with the squad of guys from different backgrounds? You know, the one with the smart-ass and that Italian guy with the thick Brooklyn accent? Yeah, those are your platoon buddies going overseas to die with you.

Once you do ship out, all hell breaks loose as the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. Finally gratifyingly, the game kicks into gear with a rapid-fire sequence of signature *Medal of Honor* scripted events. The game engine is a marvel, and while the lush density of the game's many jungle battlegrounds is going to get a lot of the attention, I don't know that the game is ever more impressive than it is in these opening levels, with countless Zeros tearing through the skies men screaming orders or simply for help, and gigantic ships exploding then groaning painfully as they sink. *Medal of Honor* has staked its reputation on epic, cinematic action, and it delivers it here. Decisively.

## Island hopping

The rest of the game tends to be more intimate, with your squad carefully working its way through the jungle, engaging enemy patrols or assaulting small enemy bases in pitched firefights. The enemy A.I. is



The banzai-ing Japanese forces aren't the problem at Tarawa—it's the frequently unfair machine-gun nests and the like that force you to keep reloading.

## The vast bulk of the fighting is gripping, visually arresting, tough, and strategically challenging.

pretty good, flanking you, taking cover, retreating, or advancing dynamically depending on the current situation. About the only time the enemy A.I. aren't so smart is when they just charge en masse during one of the "hold off the waves" sequences the game relies upon a little too frequently. After the harrowing experience of securing an airfield on Guadalcanal, just holding the line in a shooting-gallery sequence is somewhat of a letdown.

In a nod to *Call of Duty*, *Pacific Assault* adds some vehicle-based rail sequences as well as some plane-gunners duty. These are generally a great deal of fun, with the notable exception of the few levels that have you flying a warplane. I understand it's a game and I understand it's a game aping the most gung ho war movies ever, but I also understand that my infantryman would never be expected to suddenly pilot a fighter plane, let alone perform all the bombing runs and dogfighting while the other Allied pilots wait around. And I understand the plane handles like a turd with wings.

Still, the vast bulk of the fighting in *Pacific Assault* is gripping, visually arresting, tough, and strategically challenging. You can't charge in, tommy gun blazing—you'll have to pick your way through engagements using cover and (ideally) flanking your enemy. Adding to the

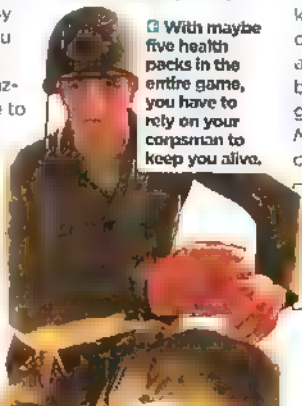
strategy is the revamped health system. Instead of grabbing health power-ups, you have to request medical aid from a corpsman, and he has a limited supply of bandages every level. The "should I heal or should I wait?" medical brinkmanship this brings to the game adds a sweet tension to most every level.

## Starting over

Actually, that sweet tension gets a little bitter during the final insanely brutal levels at Tarawa, where you died back at the beginning of the game. *Pacific Assault* is a fairly short game—maybe a dozen hours at the default setting—and these last levels feel less like an endgame challenge or a reflection of the viciousness of the actual battle than they do an attempt to eke out a few more minutes of gameplay. Hmm...maybe that's why the loading times seem to crawl, as well.

It's safe to say EA has released the best WWII multiplayer game ever. It's just that that game is actually *Battlefield 1942*, not this one. *Pacific Assault* has a respectable number of multiplayer options, but really—why? The lag, more than the sparse competition, was killing me. This game is truly all about the cinematic dramatic single-player campaign, and it is there that it shines, often brilliantly, but a little too briefly. Of all the WWII games storming store shelves this year, *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* is the cream of the crop. **Robert Coffey**

With maybe five health packs in the entire game, you have to rely on your corpsman to keep you alive.



## Verdict ★★★★★

The single player game is a lot of fun...while it lasts.



**ESRB:** M **PUBLISHER:** Vivendi Universal **DEVELOPER:** 2015 **GENRE:** Shooter **REMARKS:** **M** **REQUIRED:** Pentium 4 1.3GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 3GB install **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 2.8GHz, 512MB RAM, 120MB videocard **MULTIPLAYER:** Internet, LAN (2-24 players)

# Men of Valor

Charlie, Charlie everywhere!

**W**hile fending off subwoofer-rattling waves of attackers, you've just shot your 50th bad guy of the level. Checking your health, you consider that you need to look for some healing the next chance you get. Now you're running up to the next scripting trigger, wondering if maybe you



Your squadmates are smart enough to take cover, but not smart enough to fight effectively.

should trade your rifle for a submachine gun, when—whoosh!—a fugue washes over you. Where am I? Is it World War II or Vietnam? What game is this again? The name isn't much help. *Call of Honor*? *Men of Duty*? *Medal of Valor*? It's more brain fade than shell shock.

You can't really blame *Men of Valor* for not distinguishing itself. This sort of war-movie shooter has been run into the ground, dug back up, and run into the ground again, only to be dug up again for an expansion pack. Even though the developers at 2015 started it all, there's a sense that they're as much at a loss as everyone else: When it comes to making these games, what's left to do differently?

## A different kind of war

At least *Men of Valor* avoids some of its competitors' missteps. Unlike *Pacific Assault*, it's long and varied; this is a single-player

game with legs, and it keeps twisting as it goes, making you eager to see the next level. Unlike the first *Call of Duty*, it's got a hearty full-featured multiplayer game with a spread of distinct maps and interesting gameplay modes beyond simple death-matching. Unlike *Vietcong*, it's not dragged down by bad tech. In fact, when it comes to rendering tropical jungles, *Men of Valor*'s Unreal tech holds up admirably next to *Pacific Assault*'s fancy new engine. It's no *Far Cry*, but it's convincingly choked with detailed foliage.

*Men of Valor*'s strong point is the way its gunfights tend toward a sense of realism despite over-the-top pacing and body counts. The aiming system drives home the importance of finding a safe place to stop and line up a shot. There's a clever damage model that breaks up the action by forcing you to tend to wounds and check dead enemies. Perhaps second



only to *Vietcong*, *Men of Valor* feels like a gunfight rather than a shooting gallery.

The tension is helped by the fact that you can't save the game, but this doesn't necessarily improve the gameplay. The game is automatically saved when you cross invisible checkpoints. When you die you have to restart at the last checkpoint. Although you'll rarely lose more than 10 minutes from this backtracking, you'll often find yourself playing the same 10 minutes over and over. Which wouldn't be so bad if you weren't the victim of *Men of Valor*'s cheap tricks.

### Tiger trap

For instance, the Vietcong tend to come out of the jungle, literally springing from the woodwork, spawning right next to or behind you when you least expect it. They'll sometimes fire invincibly from behind the tree line. At times you have to memorize spawn sequences, as if you were learning



Maintaining order in the courtyard.



Your ride is here.



Clearing Communism out of the palms.

the pattern for a boss battle in some console game. It doesn't help that the action is channelled in a linear path, sometimes hemmed in with fallen logs or flimsy wooden gates as boundaries.

Then there's the inconsistent A.I., which at least has the presence of mind to take cover when it's randomly repositioning itself. But the A.I. is often happy simply to ignore an enemy within a stone's throw, which means you can't really rely on your squadmates to protect your flank, much less not get in the way of your gun. The whole thing has a hapless Keystone Cops quality that undermines *Men of Valor*'s great gunplay, making the action alternate frustrating and silly. And in the end, this is what you're likely to remember: *Men of Valor* was that Vietnam game that had some really cool set pieces with a bunch of dumb guys popping out of nowhere and getting in your way. **Tom Chick**

**Verdict** ★★★

Great gunplay, shame about the A.I.

## When it comes to making these war-movie shooters, what's left to do differently?

### WAR IS \*!&#\*%!

Most war-movie shooters have a bloodless T rating. *Men of Valor*'s M rating allows for a few words like red and blue when you shoot someone and lets you touch on racial issues in opposition to the war, and drug use, although these are usually just bits of atmosphere between the gameplay.

But where the M rating is most noticeable is in the difference between playing *Men of Valor* and watching it on HBO.

It is like the difference between watching an hour-long drama on HBO and watching it on network television. *Men of Valor* uses profanity not for shock value, à la *Kingpin*, but as a crucial part of the war experience.

—GSM During a heated firefight, your men

—you, G! Gratuitous? Not in the least. If anything





# Pitfall: The Lost Expedition

I'm not wild about Harry



For a game that's been around for so long, *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition* is a real gem. It's a classic platformer with a twist: you're a explorer named Harry who's lost in a jungle. The game is a real gem, and it's a classic platformer with a twist: you're a explorer named Harry who's lost in a jungle.



©

The game is a real gem, and it's a classic platformer with a twist: you're a explorer named Harry who's lost in a jungle. The game is a real gem, and it's a classic platformer with a twist: you're a explorer named Harry who's lost in a jungle.

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**Verdict** ★★★★★

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Frogwares GENRE: Adventure ESRB RATING: T REQUIRED: Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 1.5GB install, 32MB videocard  
RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 800, 64MB videocard M PLAYER: None

# Secret of the Silver Earring

This *Earring* is a jewel

For avid readers of detective fiction, Sherlock Holmes is an icon of unmatched regard. So masterful are the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, any attempt to imitate him and add to the Holmes legacy is destined to fail. I was prepared to hate *Secret of the Silver Earring*, but this game taught me a lesson: One cannot judge a book—or a videogame—by its cover.

The story takes place over a period of several days. As Holmes, you acquire clues through solving puzzles, questioning key characters, and investigating curious locations. At the conclusion of each day, a short quiz is posed before you can proceed. You have access to your notebook while answering these questions—a smart

design choice that benefits those of us who aren't master detectives.

There is no feature in *Secret of the Silver Earring* that is not worthy of recognition. The puzzles fit perfectly into the fiction of the game, the cinematic work rivals that of any feature film, and the attention to detail in costume and set design would survive any historian's scrutiny. The story itself is inspired, and with any luck, this game is only the beginning of a rich and rewarding series of sleuthing gems. **A** Arcadian Del Sol

**Verdict** ★★★★★

The secret is out—this game is good. Very good.



Thoughtful camerawork and smart presentation give the game a movie-like feel.



For those of us who aren't Sherlock Holmes, a robust notebook feature records every clue and comment in the game.

**With any luck, this game is only the beginning of a rich, rewarding series.**



RECOMMENDED: Ubisoft | DEVELOPER: Maddox Games | GENRE: Flight Sim | HARDWARE: TITAN RAGE 300 | SYSTEM: Pentium III 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 1.15GB install  
 SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB videocard | NETWORK: Internet, LAN (2-32 players)

# Pacific Fighters

Patch it up and fly, Major!

**F**orget the obscure Russian fighters battling 26 subvariants of the Focke-Wulf 190. With *Pacific Fighters*, the most recent successor to the *IL-2* series, we finally get the planes that those of us who grew up watching *Black Sheep Squadron* have been dying for: Corsairs and Zeros! Not to mention Wildcats, Hellcats, Lightnings, Dauntlesses, Oscars, Vals, Tonys, and aircraft carriers to land them on. The *IL-2* engine and the WWII Pacific theater go together like French fries and chili.

## Hail to the fleet

*Pacific Fighters* can be installed as a stand-alone game or on top of the *IL-2 Sturmovik Forgotten Battles—Ace* expansion pack. If you choose the latter option (making this an expansion pack for a game that was an expansion pack for an expansion pack), the new engine enhancements will be carried over to the earlier games, and those games' aircraft will be available for use in custom missions in *Pacific Fighters*, which ultimately gives you a grand total of over 150 flyable aircraft. Of these, more than 40 (actually variants of about 20 planes) are new to *Pacific Fighters*. Disappointingly, the wide variety of flyable planes doesn't include torpedo bombers such as the Devastator, Avenger, or Kate. The latter two are promised in an upcoming patch, as the developer allegedly ran out of room to ship planes on the two CDs allotted by Ubisoft.

Along with missing planes, there are all kinds of signs that this sim was rushed out the door. Odd combinations such as marines flying P-39s at Midway, British B-29 bomber raids on Tokyo, and rows of parked Russian B-17s will annoy aviation buffs. The A.I.'s suicidal tendencies from earlier games in the series remain and are exacerbated by a desire to fly directly into mountains.

## Bumpy air

There are a few other things to nitpick over—the view system remains frustrating, the time acceleration/skip feature can leave you staring at planes on autopilot or a blank screen with a ticking clock for many minutes at a time, and some missions lack action. And yet, this is still one of the most enthralling sims since 1942. *Pacific Air War*: The thrill of bringing a damaged plane back aboard a tossing carrier deck, the excitement



The slew of planes includes such unusual craft as the Rufe, a float-equipped Zero.

## The *IL-2* engine and the WWII Pacific theater go together like French fries and chili.

ment of dive bombing a Japanese carrier, and the shock of re-creating Pearl Harbor are experiences you won't want to miss. New special effects combine with ultradetailed planes and new ship-damage effects to make this the best-looking combat sim yet.

Like in earlier games in the series, you'll find a quick mission generator, a full-blown mission editor, numerous single missions, and dynamic campaigns (be sure to download the campaign update from [pacificfighters.com](http://pacificfighters.com), as it addresses many of the mission complaints). The game shines best in multi-player, where head-to-head carrier battles

can contain up to 32 players.

Maddox has done a superb job of supporting previous games in the series, releasing patches that contain not just fixes, but new features and planes as well. Let's hope this trend continues with *Pacific Fighters*, because with some A.I. tweaks, flyable torpedo bombers, and various bug fixes, this game would be a sim junkie's dream.

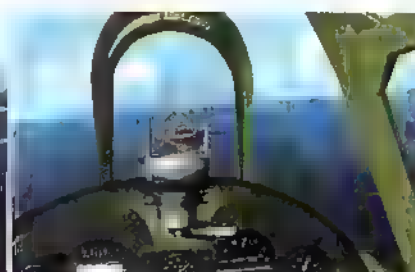
**Denny Atkin**

**Verdict** ★★★★★

It's 80 percent of the best Pacific sim yet.



Some familiar historical paint jobs are included.



Carrier landings are as thrilling as combat.

**PUBLISHER** Matrix Games **DEVELOPER** Strategic Studies Group **GENRE** War **ESRB RATING** None **REQUIREMENTS** Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 500MB install  
**RECOMMENDED** Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER** E-mail (2 players)

# Decisive Battles of World War II: Battles in Normandy

**A cut above the rest**



**Battles in Normandy** may be the best operational-level computer war game on the market today.

Most of the system is standard war-game fare—it's turn-based, units have varying combat strengths based on historical records, and combat results are determined by virtually indecipherable tables that take into account everything from terrain to artillery support.

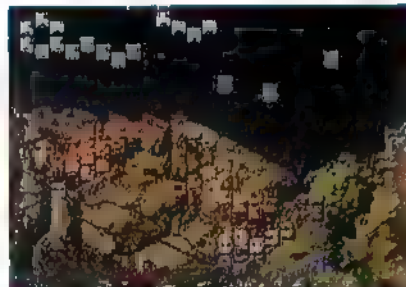
And yet *BIN* sets itself apart by successfully straddling the line between playability and detail. It avoids the senseless minutiae of the HPS games by using regimental instead of company-sized units, but it also gives strategic choices by accounting for factors like supply lines, air power, and weather. It even has A.I. that presents the illusion of competence. Although it tends to counterattack too aggressively and can't recognize potential encirclements, the A.I. is good enough to exploit some of your mistakes and provide an entertaining game—no small feat.

*BIN* has several improvements over previ-

ous games in the series, chiefly, options for naval units, artillery interdiction, carpet-bombing, and amphibious operations. Amphibious landings are the most interesting part of the lot. The Normandy coast is lined with forts and strong points that have a good chance of causing casualties in units landing nearby. The Allies must use warships to clear the beaches, but there are never enough ships, so they must decide which landing zone to concentrate on and how many casualties they're willing to risk. Done incorrectly, entire units can disappear before they can fire back a shot.

There are quite a few scenarios included in the game, from small divisional affairs to a monster 32-day scenario of the entire Overlord campaign. Most of scenarios are balanced and compelling; the Allies must generally contend with supply problems and bad weather, while the Germans must decide between holding ground or preserving their limited number of troops.

Nothing is perfect, and the game has a few



Big ships go boom—the Royal Navy bombards Caen.

minor bugs. It's also a bit pricey at \$59.99 for download, but for computer war gamers, there really isn't anything better out there. Note: *Battles in Normandy* is only available online at [www.matrixgames.com](http://www.matrixgames.com). **Di Luo**

**Verdict** ★★★★★

Short of pushing cardboard chits, you won't find a better war game.

**i**

## Conflict: Vietnam

**It doesn't completely shoot itself in the foot**

**T**

he Vietnam War was a conflict that shaped the world as we know it today. It was a war that was fought on a global scale, with the United States and its allies on one side, and North Vietnam and its allies on the other.

The war was a complex one, with many different factors at play. It was a war that was fought on a global scale, with the United States and its allies on one side, and North Vietnam and its allies on the other.

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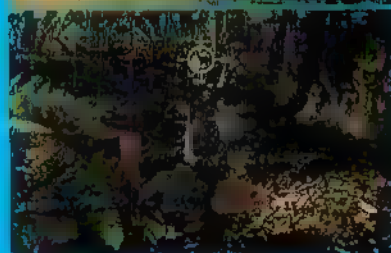
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**Verdict** ★★

Conflict: Vietnam is a decent war game, but it's not the best. It's a decent war game, but it's not the best. It's a decent war game, but it's not the best.

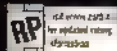
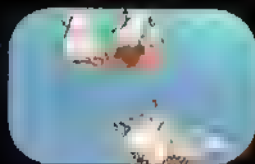






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**DEVELOPER:** Atari  
**DEVELOPER:** TimeGate Games  
**GENRE:** Real-Time Strategy  
**RECOMMENDED:** Pentium III 1.5 GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 1.4GB install  
**REQUIRED:** Pentium 4 2GHz, 384MB RAM, 128MB videocard  
**MULTIPLAYER:** Internet, LAN (2-8 Players)

# Axis & Allies

## War and Resemblance

**T**he first thing to know about *Axis & Allies* is that it has no direct similarities to the Hasbro board game of the same name. This *Axis & Allies* is a real-time strategy "inspired" by the tabletop classic. Of the three play modes, only one, World War II, bears a resemblance to the old warhorse. In practice, though, even this mode plays more like *Risk*, with battles decided by dice rolls and a single-minded focus on holding territories.

The campaign mode features a short tutorial and a separate operation for each of the Axis and Allied powers. There are a heck of a lot of missions, and they'll carry you to every theater of the war, allowing you to command all five major powers. Each side has proprietary units that look, sound, and shoot like the real thing: Germans get Tiger tanks for their heavy armor; Soviets get a quartet of lumbering T-34s. Factions also get a selection of leaders (such as Nimitz for the U.S. and Yamamoto for Japan) who have special abilities that can help friendlies or annihilate enemies. The campaigns will rotate you among all the generals, but in skirmish multiplayer, and World War II modes you choose just one.

Still, despite the variety of locales, leaders, and units, individual missions virtually always involve the same drill: destroy the enemy or capture and hold certain map points. Storm the beach on D-Day...and capture some



❑ The requisite D-Day mission plays about the same as all the other missions—and that's too bad.

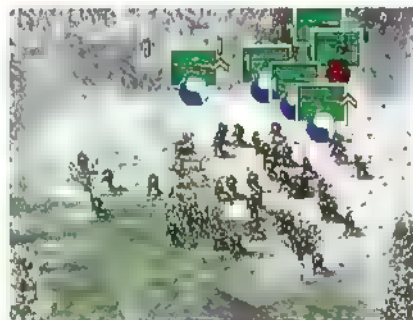
locations; sack Stalingrad, and hold some locations; retake Iwo Jima and...well, you get the idea. This lack of imagination significantly hobbles what could have been one of the more robust RTS campaigns to come along since *WarCraft III*.

### The Wince of War

*Axis & Allies'* engine is lifted directly from TimeGate's *Kohan II*—right down to the hot-keys. But if you liked *Kohan II*, don't look-and-load just yet, *Axis & Allies'* game mechanics differ notably, and not for the better.

First: *Axis & Allies'* A.I. is A-crappy. I have rarely encountered a game that evinces more clearly the rigid, stimulus-response nature of algorithmic thought. Dispatch even a few troops against the computer, and it will reflexively send all nearby units to counter. Obviously, this puts taking enemy positions in the same league as a Ken Jennings vs. Paris Hilton think-off. And that's with the difficulty set to "hard." Clunky A.I. is such a fundamental flaw in a game like this that it robs the single-player of any suspense, and winning simply becomes a chore.

Add to this deficiency other weak elements of the game engine: controls that obscure 30 percent of the viewable area, needless complexity instead of real depth, fram-



❑ *Axis & Allies* does have some nice touches, such as the way terrain has an immediate and recognizable effect on troops' movement and combat abilities.

erate and stability issues, the overwhelming power of early infantry rushes, et al., and there's not much left to pin a medal on. Multiplayer offers some solace, but since there are so many other options in this genre, you're better off spending your money on a game that provides a more gratifying solo experience. If you absolutely must have everything WWII, consider *Axis & Allies*. Otherwise, look elsewhere, soldier. —Eric Neigher

### Verdict ★★☆☆

Answers the call of duty on the battlefield, but lacks the heart of iron necessary to win a Medal of Honor.

## Axis & Allies' A.I. is A-crappy.



❑ The lack of viewable area can cause real trouble. Here, so many units are off the screen I can't even get a good assessment of how the battle is going.



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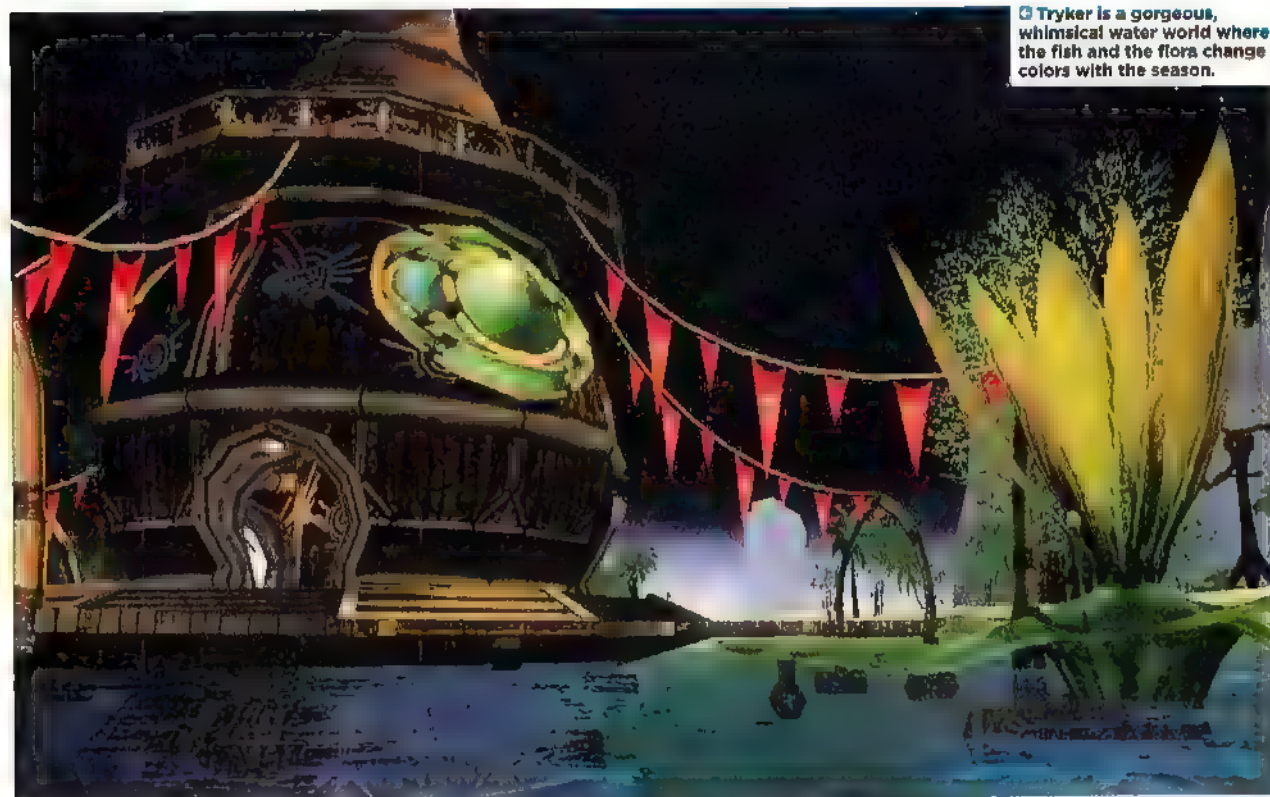
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**PUBLISHER:** Tri Synergy **DEVELOPER:** NevraX **GENRE:** MMORPG **ESRB RATING:** T **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 5GB install, 56K internet connection **RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 2GHz, 128MB videocard, broadband internet connection **MULTIPLAYER:** Massive

# The Saga of Ryzom

Too bad you can't craft a bug zapper



Tryker is a gorgeous, whimsical water world where the fish and the flora change colors with the season.

**T**he story of *The Saga of Ryzom's* planet Aty's is brief. One of Aty's' four civilizations explored the planet's core, known as the Prime Roots, and disturbed aliens called the kitin. All four civs drove these aliens back into the Roots and then returned to their homelands. Each civ still battles stray kitins as well as its own flora and fauna, and that's where you jump into this ambitious MMO.



Tryker's bright visuals and anime characters make it a fun place to battle, but its harvestable materials seem scarcer than the other civs'.

There are no class restrictions; every character begins with the same stats and potential for advancement in melee, magic, crafting, and harvesting. Each civ mainly offers a unique look and some different plants and animals to fight. Tryker is a lake region with art-nouveau architecture and an anime-looking populace. Matis' woodlands reveal buildings carved into trees and classically featured characters. Fyros is a desert with roughened warriors, and Zorai's jungles harbor a blue-skinned race of humanoids with masks melded over their faces. Each civ is stunning and alive with insects, swaying leaves, and seasonal changes that affect harvests.

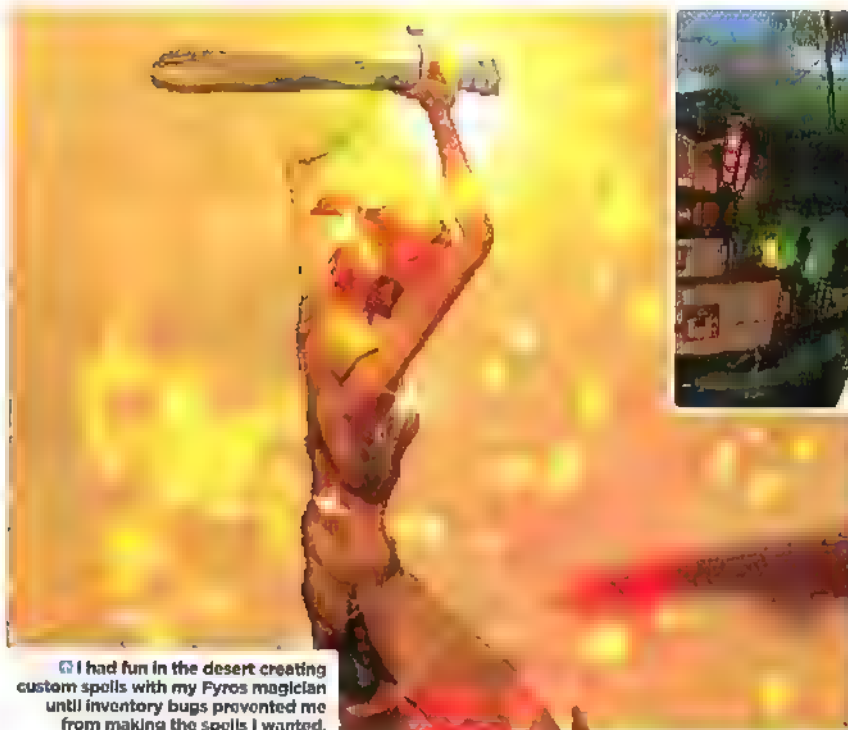
You'll only be fighting in your chosen homeland, though, unless you make the long trek through the deadly Roots or other dangerous areas to reach another civ's mainland, or you fill another of your five character slots with a different civ character.

## A living world

There are no treasure chests or loot in Aty's; you're immediately plunged into an organic self-supporting planet. You can slaughter animals for parts and harvest materials like amber, wood, and shells. NPCs hawk crude items, but real fighting power comes from player-crafted articles like the armor, melee weapons, and guns that are sold over region chat. They're made using animal parts and harvested goods, and the crafting system is clean and customizable. There is costly level grinding involved with crafting though, and while harvesting offers many prospecting and foraging options, it is complex and largely unexplained in the uninformative game manual. Thankfully, the

**With all the bugs in Ryzom, it's no wonder enemies like the kitin resemble huge insects.**





❑ I had fun in the desert creating custom spells with my Pyros magician until inventory bugs prevented me from making the spells I wanted.

GMs are knowledgeable and quick, and the friendly player community is helpful, too.

You can hit the 250 level cap in all four skill trees, and leveling in magic, melee, crafting, and harvesting always results in earning skill points for each of those categories that are used to purchase new talents from trainers. Gun ammo patterns and magic training are the most costly, but an upcoming patch should lower magic costs by the time you read this. All skills can be customized with building blocks called stanzas, which allow for more powerful or less draining actions and attacks. You can chain spell effects for more damage or add an after-dodge stipend on to a melee attack so it doesn't use stamina. This emphasis on customization even extends to harvesting, allowing you to tweak it to get the results you want.

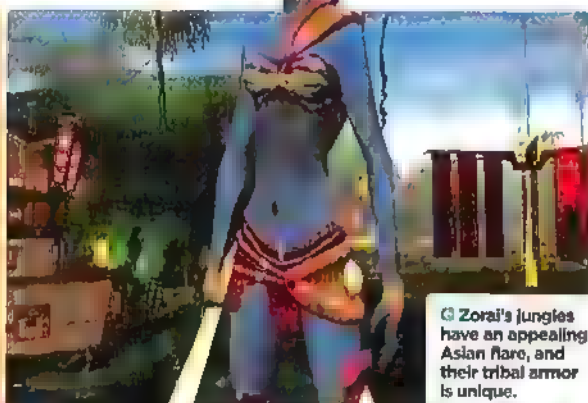
### Bigger, better, faster

You will love becoming a powerful magician with high hit points who can wield two-handed weapons if you so desire. However, you won't like that you must take crafting because of inventory bugs. Certain items won't show up in your inventory, and you sometimes won't be able to make player trades until you craft something first. Additionally, there is an armor and weapon degradation bug affecting larger teams. My Matis character was part of an exciting kit n relinvasion, but her new armor's hit points plummeted to near zero in less than two hours on a six-person team.

With all the bugs in *Ryzom*, it's no wonder the kitin resemble huge insects. The conning system fails to display mob

aggro levels, and there are visual glitches when loading the game. My friends list shrunk then grew back by itself, too. Nevra is supposedly fixing these bugs, as well as the sporadic lag on its lone North American server, but there are other signs of a rushed launch, too. Tryker's harvestable materials seem sparser than the other civs'. All civs' quests are of the UPS variety, although they're brief and pay well. On y Matis has a PVP arena, the other civs just offer spontaneous dueling. The GMs host special events, such as Matis' kitin invasion, but Zorai's event when I visited was just a hunt for a lost girl. Zorai's player population is so low that maybe one missing person is as big an emergency there as an entire alien invasion is in Matis, but it still seems like Matis gets preferential treatment.

There are no equipment losses, level losses, or corpse runs when you die in any civ, death XP debt is burned swiftly; and if a healer resurrects you quickly,



❑ Zorai's jungles have an appealing Asian flare, and their tribal armor is unique.



❑ With *Ryzom*'s broken conning system (upper left), I never know which new aliens are going to bury me while I'm prospecting for a dig.

there's no debt whatsoever. This lack of stress, combined with feeling like an intrinsic part of a real world, makes the customizable battle options continually enjoyable. Moreover, stealthily exploring the heart-pounding Prime Roots area (not only to visit other civs but also to harvest its prized materials) is a blast. If a few of the civ and skill balance issues can be corrected and Nevra can get some programming externators in soon, the kitin will be the only bugs left to fear in Atys. **Denise Cook**

### Verdict ★★★

The only thing missing from *Ryzom*'s customizable battling, harvesting, and crafting systems is a lack of bothersome bugs.



❑ The crafting window is pretty self-explanatory, and most forged parts can be used to make armor, weapons, and jewelry.



❑ I don't want to say Pyros and Matis are going to the dogs, but I'm considering a "Ganked by gingos" tattoo for my forehead.

**PUBLISHER** Konami **DEVELOPER** Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo **GENRE** Action-horror **ESRB RATING** M **REQ. REQ.** Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 2GB install **RECOMMENDED** Pentium 4 2GHz, 512MB RAM **MULTI-PLAYER** None

# Silent Hill 4: The Room

Room with a view...of hell

**P**C gamers bemoaning the demise of point-and-click adventures need look no further than the survival-horror genre to find evidence of life after death. These zombie-filled exploits retain the treasured highs (detective work, deep characterization, an emphasis on narrative) and frustrating lows (crap gameplay, arbitrary puzzles, key fetching) of classic PC adventure titles. Enter *Silent Hill*—a series openly acknowledged amongst the console-gaming set as pushing the envelope of digital horror.

Continuing the series' wicked tradition of twisting the seemingly ordinary into unsettling objects of fear and discomfort, *The Room* puts you into the jeans of everyman Henry Townshend, who awakens one day from a horrific nightmare only to find himself locked inside his own apartment. His windows have been sealed by an unknown force, and likewise, his front door has been comically locked from the inside by an impossibly over-the-top web of chains and padlocks. His entire apartment also begins to gradually mutate. A handgun materializes behind a shelf, phone lines die mysterious deaths, and a man-sized hole

suddenly carves itself out in his bathroom. In short, his place is cursed, and the answer to the riddle lies on the other side of this mysterious dark hole in the wall.

Despite this magnificent hook and some truly frightening moments, *The Room* tragically displays all the sloppiness of a quick-and-dirty console port. Since the game essentially uses the same graphics as its PlayStation 2 counterpart (except at higher resolutions on the PC), the textures lack clarity, while the overall environmental detail is kept to a crude minimum. Even worse is the game's one-two punch of awkward controls and a useless camera system, which creates additional, albeit unintended, tension and horror as you helplessly try to keep *Silent Hill*'s undead bestiary at bay.

If you can look past *The Room*'s technical shortcomings, there are some incredibly terrifying episodes to be had. The game contrasts two distinct perspectives to great effect: third person when you're roaming the dreamlike metaworld and first person when you return, confined as ever, to your tiny apartment. As a clever tribute to Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, you can even



look out the window of your one-bedroom abode to see that the world, despite your supernatural predicament, continues to carry on with its daily routine. Finally, producer Akira Yamaoka's subtle yet dynamic sound design in *The Room* completes the game's somber and oppressive mood. When it comes to sensory atmospherics, *The Room* is an unsurpassed masterpiece—just be aware that its remarkable ambience comes at a significant price. **Che Chou**

**Verdict** ★★★★★

Yet another great console game undermined by a sloppy port.

1

# Tony Hawk's Underground 2

Skate or die...or something



It's been a long time since we've seen a skateboarding game that's as fun and addictive as Tony Hawk's Underground 2. The game is a masterpiece of skateboarding simulation, with a wide variety of tricks and a highly responsive control system. The game is also a great introduction to the world of skateboarding, with a detailed and informative tutorial that covers everything from basic skating to advanced tricks. The game is a must-have for any skateboarding fan, and it's also a great game for anyone who wants to learn more about the sport.

**Verdict** ★★★★★





PUBLISHER: Mytilin Media DEVELOPER: Tilted Mill GENRE: Strategy - SUB-RATING: E RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM (256MB for Windows XP), 1.1GB install, 32MB videocard REQUIRED: Pentium 4 2.0GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: None

# Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile

**Pharaoh gets a phace-lift**

**I**t looks and plays like the Impressions city-building games (the developer, Tilted Mill, is made up of former Impressions employees), but *Children of the Nile* is fairly different at its core. Tilted Mill has made some large-scale changes to the way the city operates, and everything from basic commerce to trade has been significantly revamped.

## New Pyramid Scheme

As in previous city-building games, you must ensure your people have easy access to the things they want and need—you'll create farms and shops to meet basic needs and then satisfy more advanced desires with medical facilities and places of worship.

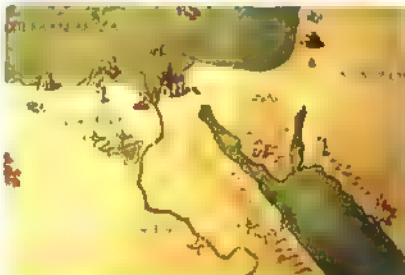
In earlier games, the goods and services would be brought to the people. *Children of the Nile* has changed this, fundamentally altering the game. If a farmer wants pottery, someone from his house must go to the pottery shop and buy it. Likewise, production has been changed. Previously, a shop gathered raw materials and an artisan turned them into goods. Now, the artisan is also the gatherer. Households work together, so the husband may gather flax while the wife turns it to linen. The end result, though, is significantly more strategy involved in city planning. Shops must be near raw materials for more effective production, and customers must be near the shops. Every moment someone is out purchasing baskets is a moment they aren't working.

This is a good model, but the A.I. isn't up to it. Households complain about a lack of goods when all the shops in the neighborhood are fully stocked. Residents take lengthy routes to their destinations or simply get stuck somewhere and don't move until you stop and fix the problem.

The economic system has been overhauled as well. Food is the only currency, which makes farms the most important element of your city. Noble houses support a certain number of farms, and as their prosperity increases, they can support more farms.



▣ Noble houses support your farms, which are the backbone of your economy.



▣ Exploration is important and will bring you new wares and supplies from traders and building sites.

Your people need enough food to eat, but you must also allocate food for expeditions (exploration plays a big role in the game) and for "upkeep" of sites under your control outside of the city. These sites will supply you with necessary materials, but if you can't pay the upkeep, the supplies stop coming.

## Queen for a day

Your primary goal is gaining prestige, chiefly through exploring, building monuments, or improving your palace. Unfortunately, prestige decreases over time. This is really frustrating because you must keep expanding and exploring to keep your prestige high, and it's easy to overextend yourself. Building monuments is a good way to add prestige, but



▣ Providing your residents with places of worship, such as cult temples and shrines, is vital.

even small pyramids take a great deal of time to complete, meaning you can't just let them be built while you admire your burgeoning town.

The biggest problem is how poorly the game runs. Well-populated cities bogged down the test system (which met the recommended specs), making it almost impossible to play the game with a large town. If the technical problems can be ironed out, *Children of the Nile* will be a worthy heir to the city-building series. Some changes are a bit frustrating, but the new distribution models and the emphasis on exploration add some great new challenges. **—Ron Dulin**

## Verdict ★★★★★

A good successor to the city-building series; unfortunately, it's marred by some technical problems.

**Everything from basic commerce to trade has been significantly revamped.**

Monte Cristo DEVELOPER: Digital Reality GENRE: RTS ESRB RATING: T REQUIRED: Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 1GB install, 64MB videocard  
 RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 1GB install, 64MB videocard Internet (2-8 players)

# D-Day

Not so much the Longest Day as the most tedious one

**J**ust when it looked like the scrap heap of Normandy-based games was in danger of going a full month without any new refuse to toss atop it, along comes *D-Day*. Thank you, Digital Reality, thank you so very much.

## From Humble beginnings

*D-Day* is based on an engine first used for *Desert Rats vs Afrika Korps*—an unexceptional 3D RTS detailing the struggles between Rommel and Montgomery in North Africa. Like its predecessor, *D-Day* focuses on many tactical elements and ignores traditional RTS standbys like resource management. All units have various combat strengths, weapons, spotting ranges, and special abilities. Tanks have weaker side armor, can dig in, and even have different hit locations. Blowing up the caterpillar tracks stops them from moving, while destroying their turrets takes out the main weapons. Infantry, on the other hand, can go prone, perform special tasks like removing mines or setting demo charges, and can be used to mount vehicles and weapon platforms to increase performance. These details add extra layers to the gameplay, but they don't make the game more fun.

While *D-Day* is mired in the minutia of reality, the gameplay actually bears little resemblance to it. The 12-mission campaign that stretches from the initial airborne landings to the Caen and Falaise operations is at best "inspired" by historical events. Rather than playing out like real battles, they're puzzle scenarios more akin to the *Commandos* games.

## Enigma machine

You begin each mission with a few units and are given difficult objectives against overwhelming odds, even in missions where you're supposed to be routing the remnants of Nazi resistance. By completing secondary or hidden objectives, you might get more resources, but the mission will still depend on finding the optimal (and often only) path to victory after many restarts. The solution usually involves crawling forward with scouts to spot enemy positions, pounding



Historical footage and interviews with veterans make *D-Day* somewhat more bearable.

those positions with artillery, and then repeating the process. Making matters worse is a poorly designed interface that requires too many clicks to execute units' special abilities. Tedium might be a part of real combat, but it shouldn't be a part of gaming.

Also, the AI is nonexistent and heavily scripted. It will attack aggressively if you

enter its detection range but will sit idly while its comrades a short distance away are blasted into oblivion.

Not everything about *D-Day* is horrible, and it deserves points for its presentation. The 3D graphics are pleasant, and the tank models are very detailed. There's a lot of historical footage, interviews with veterans, and historical data explaining the weapons, soldiers, and battles of the *D-Day* campaign. This isn't enough to save a bad game, but it at least shows that the developers cared about their project.

A good strategy game should not be slavishly attached to a "perfect solution" for every scenario. By focusing on the trivialities of equipment and weapons, *D-Day* loses sight of the primary draw of strategy games: the ability for players to make intelligent choices that affect a game's outcome. With *D-Day*, Digital Reality has pressed a second-rate puzzle game into service as a historical strategy game. **D (Day) Luo**

## Verdict ★★☆☆

It's *Commandos* with dozens of units and none of the character.

**Not everything about *D-Day* is horrible, and it deserves points for its presentation.**



**PUBLISHER:** EA Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Sports **GENRE:** Sports **ESRB RATING:** E **REQUIRED:** Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 1.5GB install  
**RECOMMENDED:** Pentium 4 1.4 GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard **MULTI-PLAYER:** Internet, LAN (2-8 players), Hotseat (2-6 players)

# NHL 2005

## Lock it out

**A**s if the current NHL lockout and the possibility of the entire hockey season getting scrapped aren't bad enough, EA Sports adds insult to injury with the release of *NHL 2005*.

New additions to this year's mode include the World Cup of Hockey, in which the top eight teams relive the recent nationals, and the face-off playbook, which is perfect for the puck-dropping pundits. There's also a wild arcade-style game called Free4All that lets four players face off against one another using half a rink and one goalie. It's fun.

*NHL 2005* resolves earlier player-bunching issues to great effect. Gamers now control the types of shots their players use, including wrist, slap, and wraparound shots. EA has also added open-ice control, which allows players to control additional skaters for improved defensive positioning, pass-

ing, and scoring opportunities.

Unfortunately, the defensive game has been ramped up significantly. Defensive players always seem to be in the right position at the right time; they come out of nowhere and block passes, create flagrant holds and illegal hooks, or just slam your players into the boards any time you move past the blue line. Scoring a goal in front of the crease is damn near impossible at the Medium and High difficulty settings. Crashing the net is the only way you'll even get a chance—and even that isn't guaranteed. Everything runs at supersonic ramming speed, and those defenders just love smashing your players into the boards.

With all the available options, you'd think you would be able to define the level of action and maybe disable these superhuman zones. Unfortunately, this can be accom-



**Q** What good is creating a team of all-stars if they can't score because the lone A.I. defenseman denies them due to his superhuman power?

A: Only by turning the game down to Easy. At that point, all you'll get is the ridiculous farce of running up the final score to 17.

*NHL 2005's* real merit lies in its on-line play and the new Free4All mode: the raw power and speed of the single-player game is way overdone. EA Sports should be penalized for game misconduct. **Raphael Liberatore**

## Verdict ★★☆☆

Last year's NHL king of the ice is this year's muddy slush.



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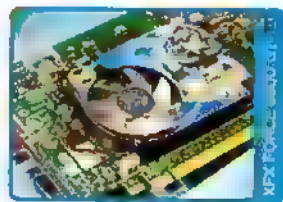
## VIDEOCARD THUNDERDOME

We test the latest and greatest and tell you what to buy



Should you go with an ATI- or Nvidia-based graphics solution? Which manufacturer offers the best options? Are you on a budget or free to spend? This month, CGW's intrepid Tech Commando tested more than 20 different videocards, force-feeding them high concentrations of textures, fill-rates, and algorithms to see which yakked first. And when the crying and whimpering finally stopped, Raphaël made the tough calls, singling out the best of the best for both AGP and PCI Express graphics solutions. And then—because he cares—Raphaël tested the sexiest widescreen LCDs for showing off all that dazzling rendering muscle. So why haven't you turned the page yet?

Inside



ASUS NVIDIA Extreme AX800 XT 256MB GDDR3  
PCI Express \$499

## BEST AND BRIGHTEST

The PCI Express poster boy

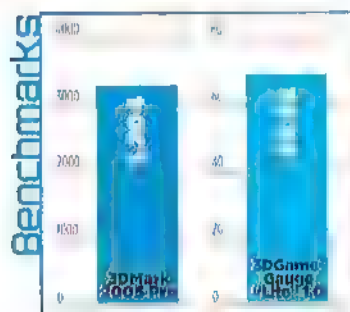


This Radeon X800 XT copy from Asus is golden. Ignore the fact that it offers the same upscale packaging, features, software bundle, and webcam as its

V9999 GeForce cousin. Simply put, the bad boy Extreme AX800 XT kicks ass. Both 3D GameGauge and 3DMark05 bench scores prove this, with the AX800 XT posting the biggest numbers (or darn near close to) of all the cards tested. Every game test scored well, and there was little or no video noise at the 1280x1024 resolution (2xAA, 4xAF). For fun, I cranked this baby up to a full 1600x1280 resolution and still enjoyed the ride. That's not so surprising when you consider that the AX800XT's 520MHz engine clock and 1120MHz memory clock (560MHz DDR) allow games to run at higher resolutions with ease.

Case modders are going to love this card as well. With a psychedelic orange glow, it cries out to be slapped into a clear case.

**SCORE: ★★★★★**



EDITORIAL ACTUALLY: Asus PRODIGY V9999 Gamers Edition Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT AGP 256MB GDDR3 GPU \$440

## AGP BURNER

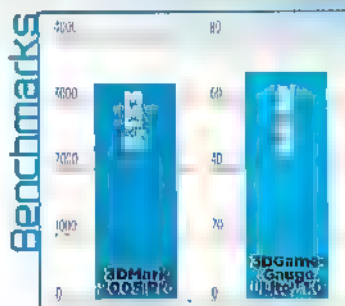
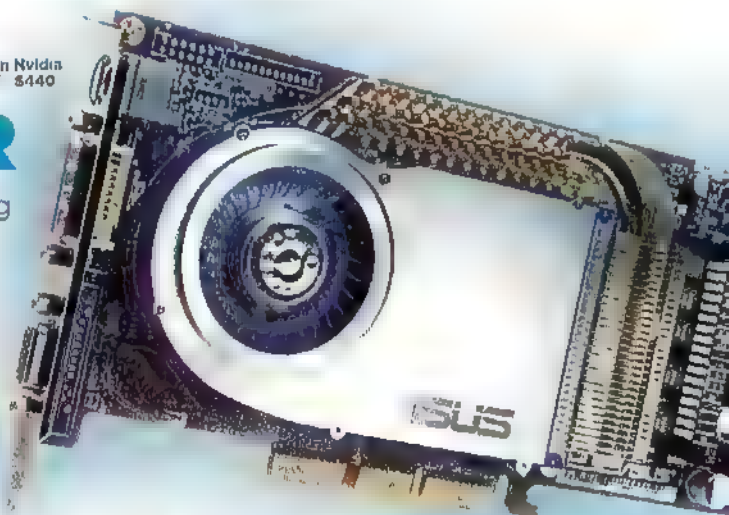
They don't call it "Gamers Edition" for nothing



Asus makes a slew of Nvidia and ATI graphics cards, and we tested several. The Asus V9999 isn't its fastest product, but it still runs with the best of them—only two other videocards scored higher 3DMarks than the V9999's 3,133. The V9999 also showed remarkable 3D GameGauge benchmark scores for possessing smaller engine and memory clocks than the BFGTech GeForce 6800 Ultra OC. As a matter of fact, it scored a whole point higher (79.02 versus 77.98).

Asus' nice software suite includes games like *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *WarCraft III*, as well as Asus' very own overclocking utility. The V9999 also comes with an online webcam for showing friends just how stupid you look while getting gibbed in a *Doom 3* multiplayer session. Considering its lower price tag and big-time performance value, the V9999 makes for an excellent upgrade choice.

**SCORE: ★★★★★**





MANUFACTURER XFX Force 6600GT Nvidia GeForce 6600 GT  
Express 256MB GDDR3 PCI Express PRICE: \$149

# THE FORCE IS STRONG IN THIS ONE



XPX Force is one of the newer Nvidia partners bringing high performance to gamers, and its budget 6600 GT for PCI Express proves it. Benchmarks for the card, with its

Express 256MB GDDR3, show it's a real contender. In our tests, it

performed well in most games, and its price is a real

draw. If you're looking for a budget card that can handle

most games, this is a good choice. It's not the fastest, but

it's a solid performer. If you're looking for a budget card that

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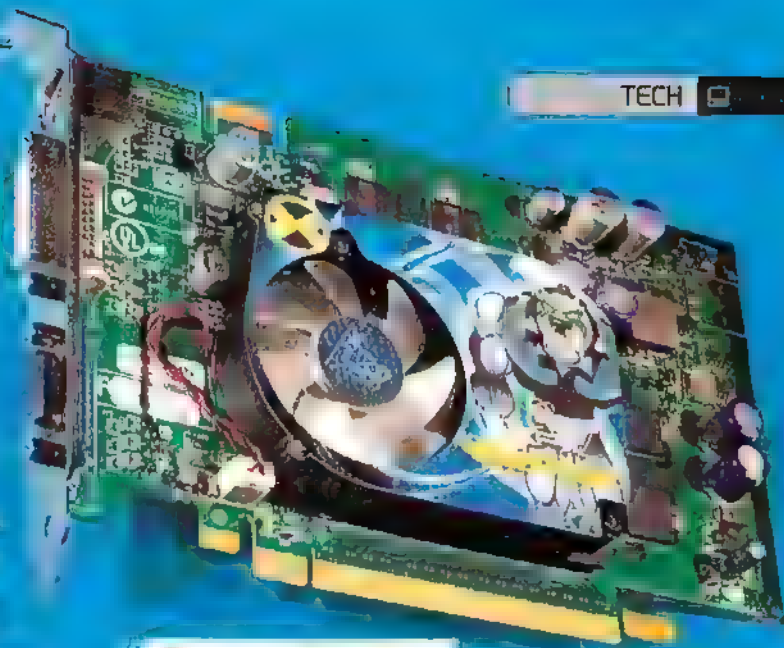
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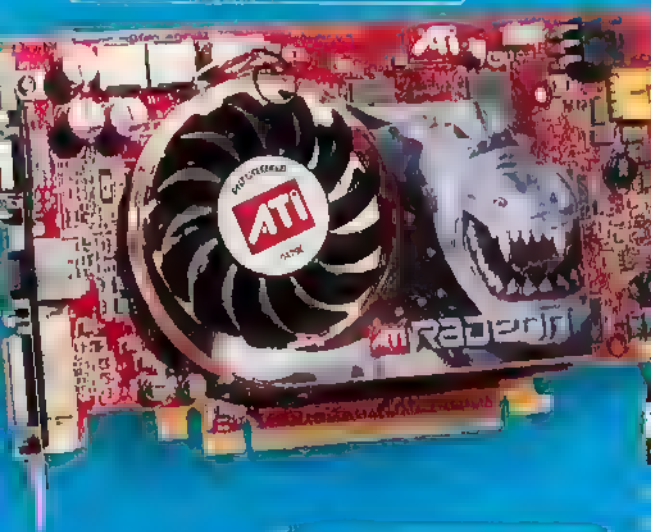
this is a good choice. It's not the fastest, but it's a



PERFORMANCE



SCORE: ★★★★★



MANUFACTURER ATI  
Express 256MB GDDR3

# CHEWS UP POLYGONS AND ASKS FOR MORE

ATI's X800 XT is a real contender. In our tests, it

performed well in most games, and its price is a real

draw. If you're looking for a budget card that can handle

most games, this is a good choice. It's not the fastest, but

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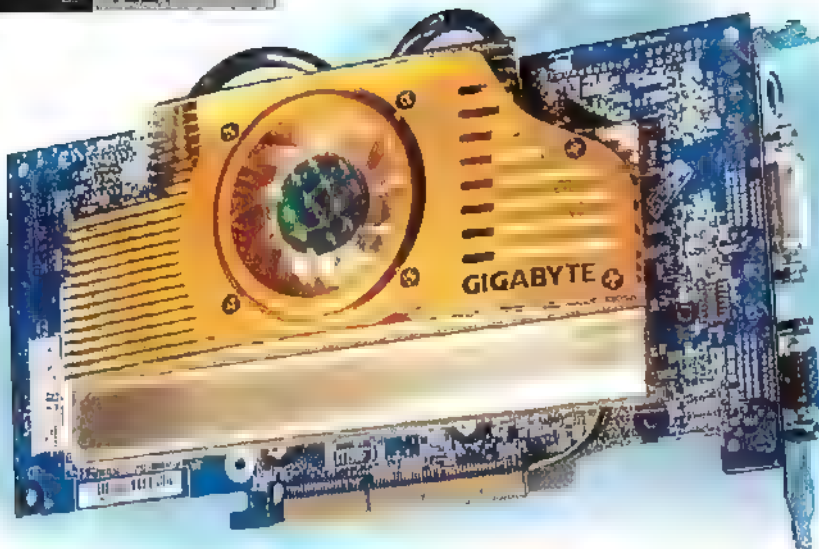
solid performer. If you're looking for a budget card

that can handle most games, this is a good choice. It's



In all, the X800 XT is a stand-out

SCORE: ★★★★★



**Best Buy** Gigabyte PRODUCT N68T256DH Nvidia  
GeForce 6800 GT AGP 256MB DDR3 MSRP \$450

## GOOD, NOT GREAT

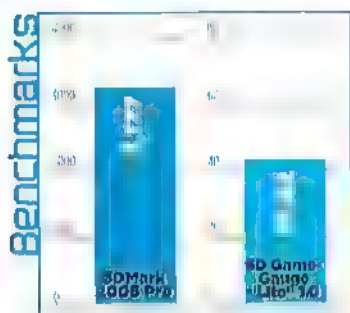
Gigabyte's GeForce just misses the mark



The N68T256DH offers the best performance and style of any of the GeForce 6800 series cards. It features a brass-colored heat sink and fan on one side and a heat sink with stovepipes on the other, which separates it from the standard Nvidia 6800 series design. Interestingly, the fan sits on top of the card and glows neon blue.

Even though this card arrives with standard clock speed settings, it comes packaged with Gigabyte's V-Tuner 2 Plus overclocking utility for when you get an urge to push framerates in *Doom 3* (which is included). The Gigabyte's 3DMark05 of 3,177 ranks near the top of the scores among cards tested this month. *Halo* and *Doom 3* benchmarking aside, the *UT2004* and *Painkiller* scores were disappointing for a card as fast as this. Toss those scores out, though, and you have a card with stable performance and great potential for the overclocking enthusiast.

**SCORE:** ★★★★★



**Best Buy** BFGTech NVIDIA BFGTech Nvidia GeForce 6800 Ultra OC  
AGP 256MB GDDR3 GPU MSRP \$599

## BIG FUN GAMING

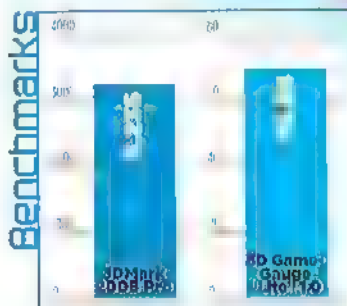
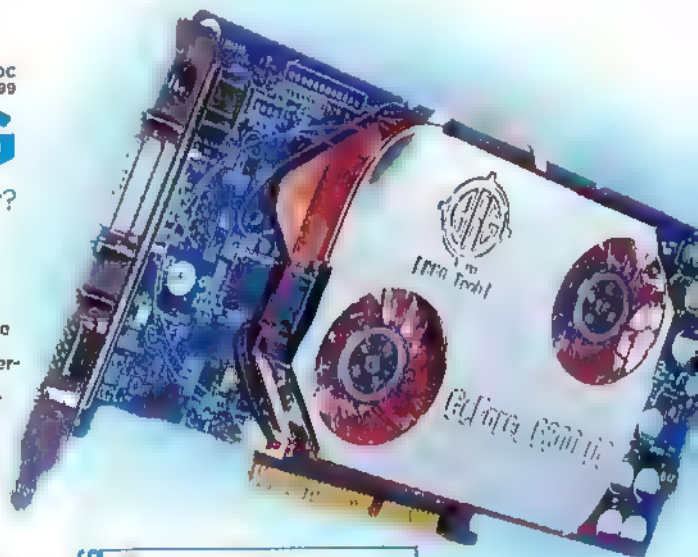
What else would BFGTech stand for?



**BFGTech** hits the ground running with its overclocked GeForce 6800 Ultra OC GPU. Having an engine clock stretching past the 425MHz mark definitely helps push the envelope: The Ultra OC earned the fastest AGP (non-water-cooled) videocard scores of the roundup, flat-out dusting every competitor in every bench test, including ATI's top dog, the Radeon X800 XT PCI Express card. Watching this card chew up *UT2004* and *Far Cry* frames was incredibly impressive. Even the *Halo* scores at 12x10 (2xAA, 4xAF) moved past the 100fps barrier. The Ultra OC also features dual DVI, HD, and S-Video ports. The big bummer is that it takes up two expansion slots. But with a lifetime warranty and 24-hour technical support, I can live with one fewer PCI slot.

VoodooPC supplied us with a water-cooled FX-55 Rage housing a BFGTech 6800 Ultra OC with waterblock (basically the same card but with water cooling) and it stole the show with crazy *Doom 3* benchmarks. However, you can't touch this badass board unless your system can handle a 550-watt power supply and water-cooling setup.

**SCORE:** ★★★★★







$$J_1(x) = \int_0^x \frac{1}{\sqrt{1-t^2}} dt = \arcsin x$$
[illegible]

Value name: Coolbits

Value data: 3

Base

☒ Hexadecimal

☐ Decimal

OK Cancel

**STEP 2** In the **Value Data** box, type the new value and click **OK**.

☐ Auto overclocking  
☒ Manual overclocking

Settings: Performance (3D)

Core clock frequency: 4800 MHz

Memory clock frequency: 1.10 GHz

Detect Optimal Frequencies

**STEP 4** Whenever you change a setting, be sure to activate it by running a graphics-intensive 3D game like *Star Wars™* or a 3D benchmark like *3DMARK™*. Verify the motherboard, or, ideally, a high-resolution graphics card, is maxed out to the board's rated capability. The goal is to drive the graphics processor clock to a steady 333MHz, or 330MHz in the absence of a steady-state clock frequency. Immediately after the graphics processor becomes maxed out, query the clock frequency while it is still maxed out and write the value down. It is normal to observe a drop in the clock rate when the processor is no longer maxed out. If the clock rate is not maxed out, the processor is not running at its rated frequency of 400MHz and a memory clock frequency of 600MHz and our 6800 can bid the video card a good game. All the cards in the table are 333MHz processors.

STEP 1: **File** → **New** → **Blank** → **OK**

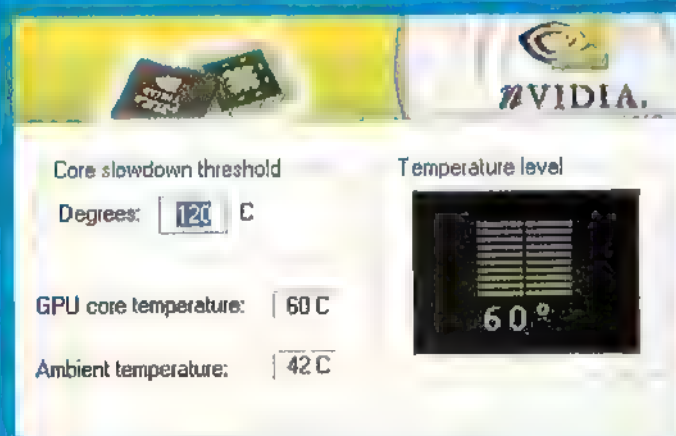
STEP 2: **File** → **Save** → **Save As** → **File Name** → **OK**

STEP 3: **File** → **Open** → **File Name** → **OK**

STEP 4: **File** → **Print** → **Print** → **OK**



**STEP 3: Close the application file.** Click on the **File** menu, then **Close**. The application window will close, and you will return to the desktop.



Overclocking can damage your hardware and void your warranty.





MANUFACTURER Philips PRODUCT Philips Brilliance 230W5VS 23-inch LCD Price \$1,999

## THE (REALLY) BIG PICTURE

Widescreen comes to gaming



Any gamer would love an LCD that's big on image quality, real estate, and affordability. Add a few bonuses like WUXGA wide format, built-in speakers, DVI, convergence video connection sources, an embedded power supply, and a 6-in-1 card reader, and most gamers would toss their CRTs for one. The Brilliance 230W5VS 23-inch LCD from Philips is packed with all these features, but all the glamour and glitter comes at a hefty two grand price. With a 500:1 contrast ratio, a 16ms response rate, and a 1900x1200 at 60Hz native resolution in widescreen, the 230W5VS so enhanced *Far Cry's* vibrant blue skies and rich white beaches that I almost booked tickets to the Caribbean. It also does a decent job on blacks, even in *Doom 3's* murk. Lower response rates keep it from choking during a huge *Rome: Total War* battle. Text display comes up short, lacking the smooth detail and clarity of an Apple Cinema Display. Still, there's a lot to love here, and if you're rich, you'll be assured of a spectacular gaming experience.

SCORE: ★★★★★

MANUFACTURER Apple Computer PRODUCT Apple 23-inch cinema HD Display Price \$1,999

## APPLE'S VISION

Like the iPod, a cross-platform winner



Apple is best known for innovative, sophisticated, and elegant designs, and its newly redesigned 23-inch Cinema HD Display is no exception. Its brushed aluminum casing and hidden buttons make the description of "sleek" feel like a major understatement.

When running *Doom 3* at a 1920x1200 at 60Hz resolution, the images this monitor displays at 16ms are nothing short of spectacular. Blacks are jet-black, and bright whites, well, they could sear your retinas. Detail is razor sharp, especially when reading tiny NPC text balloons in *Neverwinter Nights*. Its vibrant and warm colors are simply gorgeous.

The Apple Cinema Display does lack some of the cool integrated features of the Philips 23-inch LCD, as it has only USB 2.0 and FireWire ports. And I wish it had more than just a Brightness button. However, it's a small sacrifice when the payoff is the awesome image quality this LCD delivers.

SCORE: ★★★★★



# THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

Leading-edge Performance Today, With Readiness For The Future

VICIOUS PC



ULTRA  
PERFORMANCE  
NOTEBOOK



15.4" WIDE SCREEN  
MOBILE ATHLON™ 64 PROCESSOR  
ATI RADEON 9700 PRO VIDEO

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The Only Microsoft  
Windows®  
Compatible 64-bit  
Processor



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Assassin  
Price: \$1999

AMD Athlon™ 64 3700+ Processor With Hyper Transport™ Technology  
NVIDIA GeForce 6800 GT 256MB DDR  
1024MB Dual-Channel PC3200 400MHz DDR RAM Memory  
Dual 120GB SATA 150 7200 RPM RAID Array Hard Drive  
16X DVD/52X32X52 CD-RW Drive  
ViewSonic 19" PerfectFlat G90FB 21mm dp Monitor  
Altec Lansing 251 5.1 6-Channel Speakers w/ Subwoofer  
500W Translucent Case and Lighting  
Lifetime Technical Support  
Multimedia Office Keyboard and Optical Mouse  
Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition w/ Full CD  
Conserves power and operates quietly with AMD Cool'n'Quiet™ technology

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# Check Out



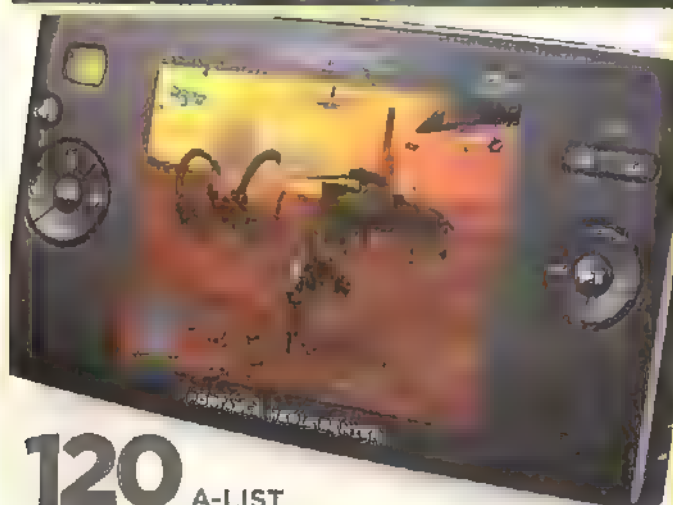
KILLER RIG



REWIND 100



GAME OVER



A-LIST

## Inside

Heroes—are they born or made? Send your answer to [cgwletters@ziffdavis.com](mailto:cgwletters@ziffdavis.com). But before you launch into your theoretical treatise, check out our 5 Indispensable Tips for succeeding in *City of Heroes* and see if you can't cobble together some heroics of your own. Plus, hot advice for decorating on the cheap! No, we're totally not kidding.

# Killer Rig

## The Silver and Black Express

**E** PCI Express is the new I/O (input/output) technology with massive throughput perfect for gaming. As more and more manufacturers jump on the bandwagon with a run of PC Express products, it's time for CGW to join the party.

The Silver and Black Express, CGW's first do-it-yourself PCI Express system, is based on Intel's 925XE chipset and utilizes the Intel Pentium 4 Extreme Edition processor, which clocks in at a robust 3.46GHz and features a whopping 1,066MHz frontside bus. We match our Killer Rig's brain trust with a phenomenal PCI Express motherboard from Asus; its P5AD2 Premium is the best PCI Express motherboard design available, bar none. With its multitude of onboard features, such as dual-gigabit LAN, Wi-Fi 802.11g support, Dolby Digital, high-definition audio, dual-channel DDR2, triple RAID, and tons of ports, as well as a handful of handy overclocking features and utilities, the P5AD2 is the most reliable PCI Express-capable board available. Best of all, Asus offers an outstanding three-year warranty. Throw in an ultrafast 400GB SATA HDD from Hitachi, two full gigs of Corsair DDR2 RAM, a dual-layer DVD rewriter from Mad Dog, and an ATI Radeon X800 XT 256MB DDR videocard and this rig is primed to haul ass. What do the numbers say? The machine posted a 3DMark05 score of 3,177 and a 3D GameGauge Lite score of 74.77—not Ultimate Game machine territory, but still

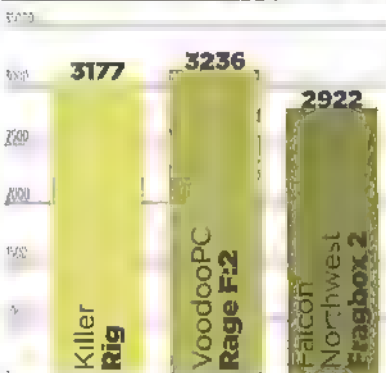
pretty damn quick.

Housed in a classy Thermaltake Tsunami Dream chassis with a Butterfly 480-watt power supply, this machine is one styling performer. The system is polished off with an earthquaking ProMedia speaker system from Klipsch and Apple's sweet 23-inch Cinema HD display monitor (see review, page 115), which makes for improved image clarity when playing games like *Doom 3* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* or just watching high-definition broadcasts

by Raphael Liberatore



## 3Dmark05



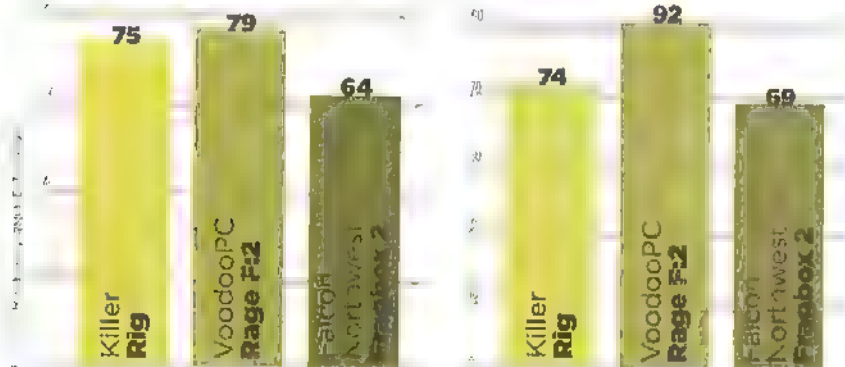
**As more and more manufacturers jump on the bandwagon with a run of PCI Express products, it's time for CGW to join the party.**





	COMPONENT	PRICE
Operating system	Microsoft Windows XP Professional Edition SP2	\$135
Case	Antec 10100 Series Tower Case	\$99
Power Supply	PowerMax 450W	\$62
Processor (CPU)	Intel Pentium 4 3.0GHz Processor with 3MB Cache	\$445
Motherboard	Asus P4M800 Motherboard	\$259
Memory	Corsair XMS2 Pro 4GB DDR2 Memory	\$880
Hard drive	Hitachi Deskstar 7K400 400GB Serial ATA 7200 rpm hard drive with 8MB buffer	\$380
Graphics	ATI Radeon X800 XT PE Express 256MB DDR VIVO graphics card	\$499
DVD-ROM drive	Mad Dog MegaSTOR 16X Double Layer DVD-RW External hard drive	\$119
Flppy drive	Sony 144MB floppy drive	\$14
Monitor	Apple 23-inch Cinema Display	\$1,999
Keyboard	Microsoft Digital Media Pro Keyboard	\$30
Mouse	Razer Diamondback Mouse	\$59.99
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia Ultra 5.1 speaker system	\$349
TOTAL COST		\$3,349.99

## Doom 3



# A-List

## Our picks

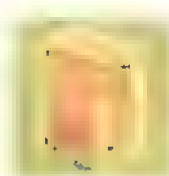


Man oh man, is there a lot of cool stuff out there right now.

Good thing, too, since ever

cooler games requiring ever more power are coming down the pike faster than you can say, "Upgrade!"

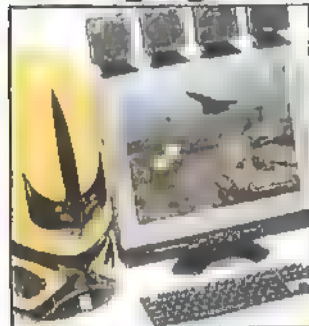
We want you to choose wisely, though—money's too tight to mention for a lot of us, and we want to see you get the most out of yours. Thus, this month's A-List, our quick compendium of the machines and parts we think are worth a look-see. Oh, and we threw in a few toys for good measure.



## COMPUTERS

Maybe you're the tricky sort who likes to take on projects, like changing your own oil and brewing your own beer. And maybe after those mechanic and hospital bills, you've learned your lesson. When it comes to stuff like cars, food, and computers, the experts know what they're doing.

### Gaming systems



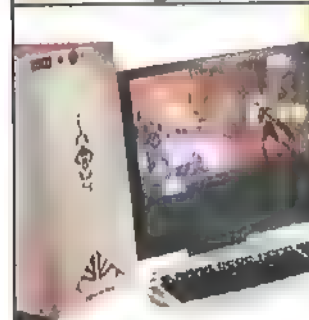
#### PRODUCT

##### HIGH-END PICK

**FX-55 Rage F:2**  
\$3,700  
VoodooPC

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

This company walked away with our 2003 Ultimate Gaming Machine top honors, and it's still kicking out amazing gaming PCs. The Rage F:2 is water cooled and boasts an AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 2.75GHz processor and a BFG Tech GeForce 6800 Ultra OC videocard. This baby was practically made for *Doom 3*.



##### BUDGET PICK

**Gamer's Supreme**  
\$1,595  
iBuypower

Hoo-whaa! With a Pentium 4, an Abit PCI Express mobo, an Nvidia GeForce 6800 GT, 1GB DDR 400 RAM, a DVD+/-RW drive, and a Viewsonic 19-inch monitor, the Gamer's Supreme is a supreme deal, all right. Plus, it comes with free onsite warranty coverage.





## PERIPHERALS

Oh, we were going to make some lame joke about how important it is to accessorize, but we just know it's been done before. It's all been done before....

### Headset



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

• **AHS 602**  
\$60  
Altec Lansing

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Like clamping excellent speakers to your ears, but a lot more comfortable. And fashionable. And less expensive.



## DISPLAYS

The allure of the speed-demon PC is somewhat lost if you don't have a beauty of a monitor to make the pictures look pretty. Yes, that is an Apple monitor we're recommending—but don't get your undies in a bunch. With its adoption of the industry-standard DVI connector, it's a more-than-viable option.

### LCD monitor



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

• **Apple Cinema Display 23-inch LCD**  
\$1,999  
Apple

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

As always, it's an Apple product in a sleek package. Our own Tech Commando has described this LCD monitor as "sharp and sophisticated." Considering the fact that he can kill people with his bare hands and survive for weeks by eating bugs and small rocks, we consider this to be fairly high praise.



## GADGETS

We at CGW are like a bunch of ferrets in that we love to hoard shiny objects. We are unlike ferrets in that we don't steal your silverware, hide your car keys, or spray to mark our territory. At least, not usually.

### Gadgets



#### PRODUCT

##### OUR PICK

• **Portable Media Center**  
\$500  
Creative Labs

#### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Yes, you can take it with you! This funky, chunky device is one of the first of its kind for stashing your MP3s and video footage. Compress various video formats to work on the 3.8-inch, 320x240 pixel resolution backlit LCD display, and you can kick back and watch up to 80 hours of TV shows on this baby, or output them to a TV.



##### OUR PICK

• **Sidekick II**  
\$250  
T-Mobile

This thing means instant geek street cred. Use it to surf the Web, e-mail your buddies, stay connected via AOL Instant Messenger, sync with Outlook over the Internet (via downloadable software), and generally otherwise ensure that you never have a moment's peace. Did we mention that you can make phone calls with it, too?

# Fast Forward

Welcome to Fast Forward, CGW's monthly back-of-the-book hodgepodge of all things PC-gaming related. Every month, we'll offer up a handy reviews index, a few editors' picks, and whatever else we manage to think of.

## CITY OF HEROES: 5 INDISPENSABLE TIPS

Heroes, your aid to the citizens of Paragon City proceeds apace, especially since *Issues 1* and *2* are either here or will be soon. Your dedication is praiseworthy! As a small token of thanks, we herewith provide you with five tips we know will aid in your crusade against crime in our fair city's streets. Onward!

■ Rod Servantes

### STAMINA

Perhaps the most useful power pool skill in the game, stamina increases a hero's ability to regenerate his endurance. Since your stamina remains at 100 from level 1 to level 50, getting a power that helps replenish endurance points means you can perform a lot more actions.

### HASTEN

Reducing the recharge time of all your powers by more than half makes one a most formidable hero. And when you six-shot this power to a perma-hasten status, it will basically double your effectiveness as a fighting machine.

### AREA OF EFFECT ATTACKS

It's rare to find enemies standing all by themselves at higher levels. Most of the time, there are two bosses standing around with some minions. Area of effect attacks allow you to keep pounding on the bosses while doing some damage to the minions, if not knocking them off altogether.



Kristen's  
Picks

### Unreal Tournament 2004

I know I'm behind the pace on this, but at least I

haven't let it slide completely. Anyway, it's worth picking up anytime, especially for a Shooty McBang-Bang like me.



### RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

So then, my current land-speed record to fill an open field with a handcrafted coaster of death: 7 minutes, 20 seconds. I think I can do better.



### Half-Life 2

I'm all about Bioshock from the past lately, and I figured the best way to get suitably prepped for *Half-Life 2* was to revisit the stunning original. I know, what? 50 years later, this game still kicks ass.



**DEFENSE**

Both active and passive defenses are a must. At level 30 and above, you'll be facing ever larger numbers of criminals. Active defense powers (including Evade) are good, but a passive defense means you won't be hurt so much when a bad guy does land an attack; after all, it's pretty tough to evade 12 Freakshows.

**TRAVEL POWER**

Some people have disregarded travel power for role-play purposes, but getting around quickly means you can help your friends and sell enhancements faster, which makes for less overall downtime. In the long run, travel power is simply a must.



# Rewind

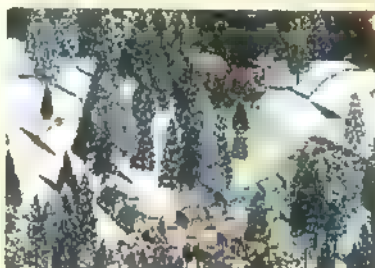
## 100

What should you play today? Names in red indicate Editors' Choice games

GAME	ISSUE	DATING
Across the Dnepr	04/04	★★☆☆
Alida	Holiday 04	★☆☆☆
Alpha Black Zero: Intrepid Protocol	12/04	★★☆☆



Q American McGee Presents Scrapland	Holiday 04	★★★★
Arena Wars	Holiday 04	★★★★
Aura: Fate of the Ages	10/04	★★★★
Battlefield Vietnam	06/04	★★★★
Besieger	09/04	★★★★
Beyond Divinity	08/04	★★★★
Breed	07/04	★★☆☆
Call of Duty: United Offensive	12/04	★★★★
Campaigns on the Danube	12/04	★★★★
Catwoman	11/04	★★☆☆
Chaos Legion	08/04	★★☆☆



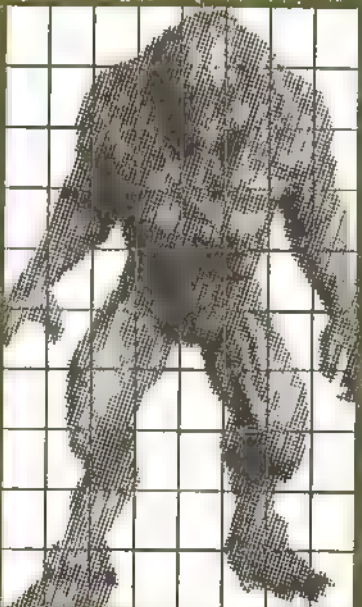
Q Chris Sawyer's Locomotion	Holiday 04	★★★★
City of Heroes	08/04	★★★★
Codename: Panzers	11/04	★★★★
Conspiracies	05/04	★★★★

## DOWNLOAD THIS

### The Rasterbator

<http://homokaasu.org/rasterbator/>

Looking to decorate on the cheap? Check this out. The site's self-description is so accurate, we're just going to repurpose it in full: "The Rasterbator is a Web service that creates huge, rasterized images from any picture. The rasterized images can be printed and assembled into extremely cool-looking posters up to 20 meters in size." If we can spazzy up the CGW offices (see photo), imagine what you can do in the comfort of your own home. The site's awesome online gallery should generate some ideas.



## Rewind100

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
Crusader Kings	08/04	★★★☆☆
Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm	08/04	★★★☆☆
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Dark Motives	08/04	★★★☆☆
Dark Fall II: Lights Out	Holiday 04	★★★★★
Dead Man's Hand	08/04	★★★☆☆
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Corps	07/04	★★★★★



Doom 3	10/04	★★★★★
Evil Genius	12/04	★★★★★
Far Cry	06/04	★★★★★
FIFA Soccer 2005	Holiday 04	★★★★★
FireStarter	06/04	★★★☆☆
Galactic Civilizations: Altarian Prophecy	12/04	★★★★★
Full Spectrum Warrior	Holiday 04	★★★★★
Gangland	06/04	★★★☆☆
Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	10/04	★★★★★
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	11/04	★★★★★
Mitman: Contracts	08/04	★★★☆☆
Horizons: Empire of Isaria	05/04	★★★☆☆
Jack the Ripper	05/04	★★★☆☆
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	09/04	★★★★★
Judge Dredd: Dredd Versus Death	07/04	★★★☆☆
Kohan II: Kings of War	12/04	★★★★★
KumaWar	09/04	★★★☆☆



Q Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude Holiday 04 ★★★★★

## MADDEN PREDICTS SUPER BOWL 2005

Are you ready for some football? Forget fantasy leagues—we want to know now how 2005 is gonna pan out. Can *Madden NFL 2005* give us a decent prediction of this year's season and Super Bowl winner? *Madden* has no handicapping system, and the A.I., even after all these years, can make some weird strategic decisions on both sides of the ball, but if you're looking to play Jimmy the Greek during the season, here's one possible outcome. **By John Martin**



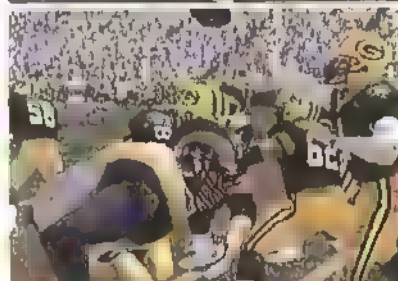
## THE RULES

Football is all about injuries, so after a bit of debate we decided to leave preexisting injuries on and also turn on in-season injuries. Game options were set to All Madden difficulty with 15-minute quarters.



## Week 4

A picture begins to emerge in week 4 of the good, the bad, and the ugly. Philly and the Boggles, er, I mean the Bengals are the only undefeated teams left. A classic matchup of Denver and Tampa Bay (two Super Bowl contenders for sure) was a wild one with six interceptions and a fumbled punt returned for a touchdown. Result: Broncos 29, Bucs 17.



## Week 12

Another season classic, St. Louis at Green Bay. On the frozen tundra of Lambeau Field the Horn Heads deliver a 45-16 drubbing to Favre and the Cheeseheads. Both teams have more than 400 yards offense (STL 490, GB 434), but the Pack takes 11 penalties.



## Division Playoffs

Buffalo edges the Colts 18-15 in OT while the Packers fall once again to the Rams; this time 31-6. Baltimore makes the Pats play a defensive battle and makes the cut 3-6. But the highlight is the Eagles versus the Bucs. The freewheeling Philly offense and loudmouth Terrell Owens make the Bucs pay, 27-15.



## Super Bowl

After stopping Buffalo's charge 27-21 in the playoffs, the Baltimore defense is ready for showtime. The matchup against the Eagles, who handily beat the Rams 23-16, proves to be a grinding defensive battle. I don't remember ever seeing so many dropped and blocked passes. With some very bad clock management in the fourth quarter, the high-flying Eagles fall 13-6. Baltimore dumps the Gatorade and hoists the trophy. You heard it here first.



## Rewind100

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	06/04	★★★★
Lords of the Realm III	07/04	★
Madden NFL 2005	Holiday 04	★★★★
Manhunt	07/04	★★★★
Missing: Since January	10/04	★★★★
MVP Baseball 2004	06/04	★★★★



Myst IV: Revelation	Holiday 04	★★★★
Nemesis of the Roman Empire	07/04	★★★★
Painkiller	07/04	★★★★
Perimeter	09/04	★★★★
Port Royale 2	12/04	★★★★
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	06/04	★★★★
Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	07/04	★★★★
Sacred	07/04	★★★★
Rome: Total War	Holiday 04	★★★★
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	Holiday 04	★★★★
ShellShock: Nam '67	09/04	★★★★
Shrek 2	09/04	★★★★
The Sims 2	11/04	★★★★
Singles: Flirt Up Your Life	09/04	★
Soldiers: Heroes of WWII	11/04	★★★★
Soldier: Secret Wars	10/04	★★★★
Spider-Man 2	11/04	★★★★
Splinter Cell	06/04	★★★★
Pandora Tomorrow		
Star Chamber	05/04	★★★★



Star Wars Battlefront	Holiday 04	★★★★
Syberia II	05/04	★★★★

# NUGGETS: THE MATRIX

Random facts for the Cliff Claven in all of us

*The Matrix*: deeply philosophical treatise, a bunch of Hollywood hooey—or favorite flick of ferrets everywhere? The Internet says, all of the above. Among 3,550,000 Google hits regarding *The Matrix*, we've discovered that, among other things:

**1** Stephen Kiehl, a staff writer for the *Baltimore Sun*, writes that allusions to *The Matrix* have surfaced in at least three murder cases. Defendants "attempted to justify their crimes with allusions to the movie's philosophy that the world people live in is only a dream sequence controlled by a computer. Violence is condoned as a way to get out of the fake oppressive world of *The Matrix*." Among those who have employed the defense: sniper suspect Lee Boyd Malvo. (<http://www.sunspot.net/news/baltimore.md.drawings05dec05.0.6939899.story?coll=bal-home-headlines>)

**2** Nitpickers.com lists 216 viewer-noted inconsistencies in the movie, ranging from an impossible number of bullets fired from one clip (17) to the reflection of boom microphones in windows. Of these, 158 have been refuted by other viewers.

**3** Michael Wexler, an associate professor of brain and cognitive sciences at the University of Rochester, formed conclusions about the way brains process the understanding of reality by undertaking an experiment in which he recorded the brain responses of 12 ferrets while they were watching *The Matrix*. ([www.scliscoop.com/story/2004/10/2/75849/9265](http://www.scliscoop.com/story/2004/10/2/75849/9265))

**4** Googling the terms "The Matrix" and "religion" yields 154,000 hits; within the top five, *The Matrix* is mentioned in the same sentences as Christianity, Buddhism, agnosticism, and atheism.

**5** Googling the terms "The Matrix" and "philosophy" yields 179,000 hits; among those are the synopsis of a published paper by a member of the philosophy faculty of Oxford College arguing that we are, in fact, living in a computer simulation. ([www.simulation-argument.com/](http://www.simulation-argument.com/))

## Rewind100

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
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Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	05/04	★★★★★
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Q Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	Holiday 04	★★★★★
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The Political Machine	11/04	★★★★★
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The Suffering	10/04	★★★★★
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Thief: Deadly Shadows	09/04	★★★★★
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Title Bout Championship Boxing	05/04	★★★★★
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TrackMania	10/04	★★★★★
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Q Tribes: Vengeance	Holiday 04	★★★★★
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True Crime: Streets of L.A.	09/04	★★★★★
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Two Thrones	06/04	★★★★★
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Universal Combat	10/04	★★★★★
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Unreal Tournament 2004	06/04	★★★★★
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Virtual Skipper 3	10/04	★★★★★
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Wanted: A Wild Adventure	Holiday 04	★★★★★
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War in the Pacific	11/04	★★★★★
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War over Vietnam	Holiday 04	★★★★★
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War Times	08/04	★★★★★
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Q Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	07/04	★★★★★
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Warlords Battlecry III	08/04	★★★★★
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Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc	05/04	★★★★★
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World Soccer Winning Eleven 7 International	10/04	★★★★★
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Worms 3D	05/04	★★★★★
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You Don't Know Jack— The Lost Gold	05/04	★★★★★
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## HIGH SCORE

Our favorite things of the moment at IUP.com

Oh, yay! Yes, that's right, yay! You've clearly embraced IUP.com, where you can create a journal, track your game collection, build a network of friends, and chat with other CGW readers. You've joined our club at [cgwfans-club.IUP.com](http://cgwfans-club.IUP.com) and communicated with us regularly. Oh, sorry, what's that? You haven't done any of this? Well, c'mon already—get on the stick, would ya?

## FEATURED BLOG



Kat Hunter  
<http://deadkat.IUP.com>

Smart, savvy, and a bit of a prankster in gaming, the art of procrastination, and freelance writing, among other things. Also a member of the illustrious Frag Dolls ([www.fragdolls.com](http://www.fragdolls.com)). Meow



## STUPID PICTURE OF THE MONTH

## CLUB OF THE MONTH

1337 b0x0Rs  
<http://Box-club.IUP.com>

"DooDs, 1337s, and n00bs alike come together and chat about ur Gaming Rig!"

## WHAT'S UP WITH IUP?

A few words from IUP.com's editor-in-chief

## YOU, TOO, CAN BE A STAR

So, apparently, some of you actually read this column that's so nicely tucked away at the end of every CGW. In fact, quite a few of you have mentioned to me that it was how you found out about the fun little network of gamers we've formed at IUP.com. One of my favorite recent examples is Jose Cardova (<http://CreativePlug.IUP.com>) from Denton, Texas. Jose wrote to me thanking IUP and CGW for rekindling his passion for gaming—he found all of these other gamers that he could relate to on the site. I loved hearing that. But what made me even happier was seeing that Jose has gone on to write one of the better blogs on the site and has started one of the most popular clubs, the "I Spy a Cutie Pie" club (<http://cutiegame-club.IUP.com>), where he and other IUP members point out some of the cutest girl and guy gamers on the site. When I last checked, he had almost 200 members in his club, of course by the time you read this, who knows what new clubs are going to be popular—but that's my point: Your club or your blog could very well be the next big thing on IUP. If it is, we'll highlight it on our front door of our newsletter—we even give out prizes to some of our top innovators each month. A community like this is always looking for new people to generate ideas for discussion, so if you want to be heard, we're looking forward to meeting you.

Sam Kennedy <http://capnsnak.IUP.com/>





# SOUND OFF

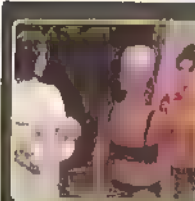
CGW's readers speak up

Think you're clever? Got some good game suggestions? Just want to share your two cents? Give us a holler and you just might show up in the pages of a future Sound Off.



## CAPTION CONTEST

Of all the pictures that you can come up with, which one is the most creative? Send us your best caption by e-mail to [cgwletters@ziffdavis.com](mailto:cgwletters@ziffdavis.com) with the subject "Caption Contest," and you just might win a prize!



### THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

"The baby's all set, but Garry's needs changing!"  
Kevin Gussel  
Northampton, MA

## POLL OF THE MONTH

Which version of Half-Life 2 will you pick when it comes out?

The retail Collector's Edition. Check out my geeky t-shirt!

30%

The standard retail edition. 'nuff said.

10%

The Silver Steam download package. I heart my Half-Life 1 remake!

15%

None of them--I'm sticking with CGW's 102 Free Games!

25%

The Gold Steam download package. Check out my geeky hat and stickers!

10%

The Bronze Steam download package. I'm waiting in retail line.

9%



## DESERT ISLAND GAMES

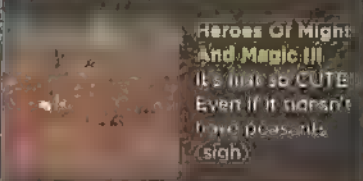
You're stranded on a desert island with only five PC games...which ones? E-mail us at [cgwletters@ziffdavis.com](mailto:cgwletters@ziffdavis.com) with the subject "Desert Island Games" (along with your name and city/state) and give us your picks!



X-Wing: CD-ROM Collector's Edition. Maybe on a desert island I can finally take the time to learn to fly. May the Empire beware my training!

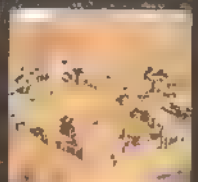


Diablo II: Lord of Destruction. Mindless action is what I want. Not to mention it's the only game I ever wanted to play online.



Heroes of Might and Magic III. It's just so CUTE! Even if it doesn't have posits (sigh).

Civilization III: Conquests. I can rebuild history over and over. If I get bored, I can tweak the rules as I wish. There are no limits!



Alpha Centauri. I will drown in the possibilities presented in this amazing game long before I have the chance to drown in the sea around my little computer paradise.

Darryl R. White  
Sandy, UT

# Tom vs. Bruce

Two gamers enter, one gamer wins

13

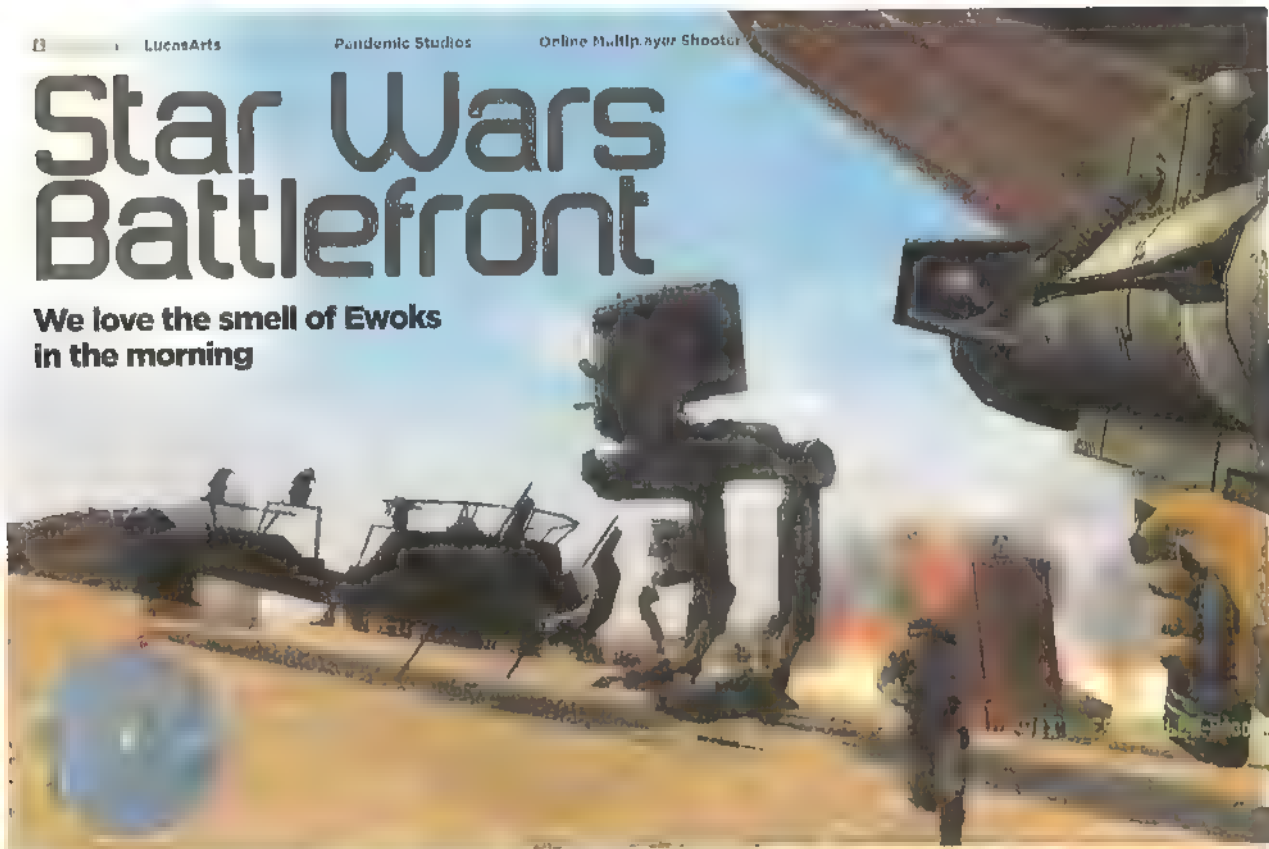
LucasArts

Pandemic Studios

Online Multiplayer Shooter

## Star Wars Battlefront

We love the smell of Ewoks in the morning



**W**hat happens when Tom and Bruce meet *Star Wars*? Whatever was going to happen, we know it couldn't be worse than Hayden Christensen's acting. Or at least we thought so. We weren't counting on Bruce taking a river trip down the heart of darkness....

### Episode 1: I Don't Like Sand

#### TATOOINE: THE DUNE SEA

**Tom:** I talked Bruce into playing *Star Wars Battlefront* by suggesting that we write it up in the style of the movies. We could follow the maps that loosely re-create the events of *Star Wars*, with each of us taking 10 A.I. teammates into battle. He thought about it for a moment and agreed. So without further ado, we begin over Tatooine. Cue the theme music!

*A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away... It is a period of civil war. Rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to BRUCE's ultimate weapon, the DEATH STAR. Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents, TOM races home aboard his starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save his people and restore freedom to the galaxy...*

**Bruce:** I'll be the first one to admit I don't know much about *Star Trek*, or whatever Tom is talking about. I mean, I saw all the movies a long time ago, but that was in an

age when you couldn't even conceive of, say, cartoon characters that took like fast food items solving mysteries and fighting crime. I was going to go back and watch them all before we played, so that Tom didn't have an advantage by knowing some twist in the backstory or something that would give him a cheat code, but that seemed like a lot of work for a game I was probably going to lose anyway. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that A) space is a lot like a river, and B) I really only know about one movie, anyway. So I'll use that one. It's way better than *Star Trek*, anyhow. Except maybe the one where Kirk dies.

**Tom:** The Dune Sea is all about air power. We're using a mod that removes those annoying boundaries that force you into a mandatory U-turn when you reach the edge of the map. This makes it a lot easier to do strafing runs, which is what I plan to do to keep the Imperial AT-STs boxed up at their spawn point. So I start out in the Bluffs as a Rebel pilot and head off one of my A.I. buddies before he can hog the last X-wing.

**Bruce:** Tatooine, crap. I'm still only



Just like bull's-eyeing womp rats in my T-16.

#### on Tatooine

**Tom:** Wait, wait, when I said we'd do the article "in the style of the movies," I meant *Star Wars*. I didn't mean "movies" in a generic sense where you pick your own movie.

**Bruce:** Every time I think I'm going to wake up back in the jungle. When I was home after our first game, it was worse. I'd wake up and there'd be nothing. I hardly said a word to Tom until I said yes to playing another shooter game. When I was here, I wanted to be there. When I was there, all I could think of was getting back to playing *Dominions*.





**Tom**  
Last month  
Tom won the votes  
of millions as the presi-  
dential favorite in *The*  
*Political Machine*



**Bruce**  
Last month  
Bruce denounced  
Tom as a Communist  
and a threat to  
national security

2 I've been here a week now. Waiting for a game, getting softer.

**Tom:** I manage to get four AT-STs with torpedoes, picking off the odd TIE fighter that tries to take off. Total Rebel air superiority! Unfortunately, while I'm doing this, I keep getting messages that we're losing command posts. When I finally take a second to check the map, I see that Bruce's Imperial troops aren't the problem. It's the damn Tusken Raiders. They've shut down my source of X-wings and combat speeders by taking the Bluffs and the Homestead. I imagine they've also slaughtered Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru. On the plus side, this means I don't have to be a moisture farmer anymore— can fulfill my destiny among the stars.

**Bruce:** Every minute I stay in this room I get weaker. And every minute Tom squats in the sand he gets stronger. Each time I look around, the walls move in a little tighter.

**Tom:** I land at the Bluffs and start shooting at Tusken Raiders. However, being a Rebel pilot, I'm armed with a "blaster cannon," which is apparently *Star Wars* speak for something that politely pelts your opponent to alert him to your presence so he can turn around and kill you. I think I'd rather have the flashlight in *Doom 3*. After being killed, I emerge at the only remaining Rebel spawn point, the Sandcrawler, to find both Imperial AT-STs camped here. Surprise, surprise, Bruce is in one of them racking up kills.

**Bruce:** Never get out of the AT-ST. Absolutely goddamn right.

**Tom:** Technically, Bruce won this round, but it would be more accurate to say the Tusken Raiders won.

**SCORE: Bruce 1, Tom 0**

## Episode II: Wretched Hive of Scum and Villainy

TATOOINE: MOS EISLEY

**Tom:** Fortunately, there are no Imperial vehicles here. This is the kind of street fighting that Bruce totally sucks at. I like to spawn at the Cantina and immediately grab the Warehouse to control the southern part of the map.

**Bruce:** Tom mentions something in the rules about mowing down Jawas for bactas or something. I'm not going to stop there though. We must kill them. We must incinerate them. Rebel after Rebel. Jawa after Jawa, village after village, army after army. And they call me an assassin. What do you call it when the assassins accuse the assassin? Tom lies. Tom lies, and I have to be merciful for those who lie. Those nabobs. I hate them. How I hate them.

**Tom:** I do some jumping around on the rooftops to shoot down into the streets, some running through back alleys, some sniping, and other stuff that might as well be in *Joint Ops*. But things turn really *Star Wars* when I see someone trying to con-



In the remastered version, Bruce shoots first.



vert the Cantina. I burst in and see Bruce himself. A shootout ensues. Like Han Solo, I shoot first. But unlike Han Solo, I lose because Bruce didn't listen when I called time out to get a screenshot.

**Bruce:** I killed Tom. Everybody wanted me to do it, him most of all. I felt like he was up there, waiting for me to take the pain away. He just wanted to go out like a soldier, standing up, not like some poor, wasted, rag-assed renegade. Even the jungle wanted him dead, and that's who he really took his orders from anyway.

**Tom:** It's close. We each get down to around 20 tickets, but now the Rebels control every place but the Market. I hang out next to the hangar and pick off Imperial troops as they cross the open area.

**SCORE: Bruce 1, Tom 1**

## Episode III: Then I'll See You in Hell

HOTH: ECHO BASE

**Tom:** It is a dark time for TOM. Evading the dreaded Imperial Starfleet, a group of freedom fighters led by TOM CHICK has established a new secret base on the remote ice world of Hoth. The evil lord BRUCE GERYK, obsessed with finding young CHICK, has dispatched thousands of remote probes into the far reaches of space....

**Bruce:** My AT-ATs come in low out of the rising sun.

**Tom:** I jump into a snowspeeder and fly off to find someone to ride in back. I land next to the first Rebel I find and frantically slap the F2 key to order him to get in. We head off toward the two advancing AT-ATs. Unfortunately, they're walking right next to each other. Once the tow cable is fired, I

have to weave between them to cinch up my target.

**Bruce:** When I get about a mile out, I turn on the music. I use Wagner. It scares the crap out of the rebels. My boys love it!

**Tom:** The Bunker has fallen, which means the Empire has a straight shot to the shield generators. I try landing and slapping F2 again, but now Bruce is making a point to shoot at me even when I've landed, which I'm pretty sure is against the Geneva convention of *Star Wars*. So I start spawning with a missile launcher since the map is now lousy with all kinds of Imperial walkers. I got a bad feeling about this.

**Bruce:** If I had one, I'd call the forward air observer and call in an airstrike to suppress the mortar fire along that tree-line. Or something. Actually, things are going pretty well. I love driving the AT-ATs because that means I don't really have to aim at stuff. I take the shield generators down, no problem. Once those are down and we've started mopping up the resistance, I can break out the surfboards. Tom Chick don't surf!

**Tom:** Someone gets into the base and takes the control room. Before long, we're closed up in the outpost, with AT-ATs and AT-STs attacking us from outside and Imperial troops emerging from the tunnel to the control room. It's a slaughter.

**Bruce:** I was the one who took the control room. When it was all over, I walked up. I didn't find one of 'em, not one stinkin' Rebel body. But the smell, you know that gasoline smell? The whole hill! It smelled like victory. Someday this game's gonna end.

**SCORE: Bruce 2, Tom 1**

## Episode IV: Got Gas?

BESPIN: CLOUD CITY

**Tom:** There are long lines of sight on this map, so I start out at the rear flank as a sniper. I can see all the way down the hall to the walkway. I snipe spawning Imperials while my guys advance. Once we've got the rear flank and walkway, I grab the forward flank. Now we've got a great vantage point to fire down into the courtyard, racking up an absurd number of kills.

**Bruce:** How many people had I already killed? There were those six that I know about for sure. Close enough to blow their last breath in my face. Oh, if you're talking about the game, you can kick that number up to maybe 16, which is nothing on Tom.

**Tom:** Eventually, I swing around to grab the rear entrance, and then run on to the carbon chamber. Me and a Wookiee take on a couple of dark troopers in here. Once we capture it, I emerge in the front of the courtyard and continue sniping Imperial troops as they spawn. The A.I. likes to run for the gun emplacements, which makes them perfect sniper fodder as they're standing stock still ensconced in their turrets. This is payback for Hoth.

**Bruce:** The Rebels don't get much USO. They're dug in too deep or moving too fast. Their idea of great R&R is cold rice and a little bit of womp rat meat. They only have two ways home: death or victory.

**Tom:** Since I control Bespin, I have an unlimited supply of Tibanna gas to power my, I dunno, my Tibannas. Now that I have the carbon freezing chamber, maybe I can lock Bruce into carbonite until he starts quoting the right movies. You'd think he could at least whip out a "The Force is strong with this one" or a "Never tell me the odds."

SCORE: Bruce 2, Tom 2

## Episode V: Revenge on the Ewoks

ENDOR: BUNKER

**Tom:** Little does TOM know that BRUCE has begun construction on a new armored space station even more powerful than the first dreaded Death Star. When completed, this ultimate weapon will spell certain doom for the small band of Rebels struggling to restore freedom to the galaxy.

My strategy is to spawn as a Wookiee at



Bespin, aka Sniperfest Extravaganza 2004.



AT-ATs use the buddy system to keep snowspeeders at bay.

the point closest to the Imperial bunker and then hop onto a speeder bike to tear through the forest. Born to be wild! It's Bigfoot meets *Easy Rider*. If I can get to the bunker with my time bombs, it's pretty easy to take out the generator. The problem is that since this is a forest, there are a lot of trees between me and where I'm trying to go. I keep hitting them. Someone needs to apply a little judicious deforestation to this part of Endor. Where's Agent Orange when you need it?

**Bruce:** What with all the talk of jungles, we finally get a jungle map. Unfortunately, I'm all out of movie quotes for this evening. At least movies in English. The fact that Tom keeps choosing a Wookiee says a lot of things about him psychologically that I'll do him the favor of not mentioning in public. Because it's clear that being in a giant mechanized robot is better than not being in a giant mechanized robot. I get in an AT-ST.

**Tom:** The advantage of the speeder bikes is that they go so fast, they're almost impossible to hit. This makes Endor a pretty porous map, with Imperials and Rebels zipping past each other, swapping spawn points. I consider trying to take out the Imperial barracks to shut down their AT-STs, but I keep getting really close to the bunker. Besides, the point of this map is that the Ewoks set up traps for the walkers, using logs to smash them and trip them. At least, that's how it worked in the movies.

**Bruce:** If you're going to rebel against

a massive transgalactic Empire, it's probably wise to make sure that either you pick one that doesn't have giant mechanized shooting robots, or—failing that—find some way to get some of those robots on your side. Tom is getting his ass kicked by those things which I think is pissing him off. Sorry, Tom, you're the one who decided to disobey orders and go off with your Montagnard army, who worship you like a god and obey any order, however, ridiculous—oh wait. That's not this movie.

**Tom:** The Ewoks aren't doing jack against those AT-STs. After the way the sand people decided the battle in the Dune Sea, it would be nice to get some kind of help other than a bunch of yipping teddy bears. Hell, at this point, I'd even settle for a squad of Gungans.

**Bruce:** The most annoying thing about the Ewoks is not that they're Ewoks; it's that when I kill them, Tom's troop count doesn't go down. It's like he's getting free troops out of the fact that George Lucas simply wanted to create some more marketing gimmicks.

**Tom:** OK, forget the Wookiee on the speeder bike thing. Once again, I find myself having to spawn as a Rebel vanguard, plinking away at walkers with my rocket launcher, trying to hold the line.

**Bruce:** You know how in car commercials it always says "professional driver, do not attempt" just before some car goes all crazy and does a Tony Hawk down an empty city street? It should say, "professional AT-ST driver, do not attempt" somewhere in the screenshots for this game. Driving those AT-STs saved me in the first game, and it's going to save me now. The Rebels are racking up a lot of kills, but I'm able to keep up with them by using technology. Eventually, there are no more Rebel troopers to kill, which means I get to win.

FINAL SCORE: Bruce 3, Tom 2



This is pretty much how Tom saw most of the Cloud City map.



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## AD INDEX



## Free To Be You and McGee

Waking up from the American dream

**W**hat's in a name? No, seriously, what's in a name or, more specifically, what's in the name "American McGee"? Who is this guy and why is his name popping up on game boxes? Or, more specifically again, what is his name doing on the game boxes of games he didn't make? Who is this guy?

Well, he's American McGee, of course, the guy behind *American McGee's Alice*. You remember: It's that fairly traditional platformer that could have been called *GothGrrl168's Alice* and finally answered the question, "What would a Mario game be like if Mario had a pierced nipple?" *Alice* isn't a horrible game, but it is less a game-play-oriented product than an art-direction vehicle. And while I generally liked the look of that game, I couldn't help but feel that there's a Thora Birch look-alike with too much eyeliner and a black dress wondering how Mr. McGee found those doodles in the back of her trigonometry notebook. But, hey, he made this game, he was proud of it, he wanted to put his name on it, so huzzah! Honestly, good for you, American. In a way, it's downright laudable that he put his name right out there in a Game Buck Stops Here kind of way.

But how did he get his name on *Scrapland*? That's the one that makes my brain itch. Obviously, some marketing lampry came to the conclusion that his name sells games, but still, *American McGee Presents Scrapland*—that's the title. He didn't make the thing; his name is on the box because he's doing us the favor of introducing us to the game. Well, um, thanks there, buddy. Much obliged. But if merely presenting the game gets you on the box, shouldn't the kid at EB be getting the credit? Or does *Pimply Stammering Misfit Presents Scrapland* not have enough cachet?

And what is that cachet? Ouch, that makes the pudding in my skull slosh, too. Once upon a time, American McGee was a level designer on a little game called *Doom*. Great game that, but I seem to remember another *Doom* alumnus that put his name on a game box—It's right up there on my shelf in between *Riana Rouge* and *Trespasser*, and it's called *John Romero's Daikatana* (because *John Romero's Heartbreaking Squandering of the Good Will of Gamers and Five Years of His Life* wouldn't fit on the box). Frankly, if I were American, I'd be a little more cautious about slapping my name on a box.



**"What would a Mario game be like if Mario had a pierced nipple?"**

But it would seem that McGee has deftly dodged the hubris bullet that struck his colleague and has succeeded in turning his name into a brand, a brand that says, "Edgy, Daring, and Pierced in Naughty Spots." That's some feat, especially when you consider that the name American McGee summons up the image of a footie-pajamaed kid wearing a colander on his head and his blanky around his shoulders—a kid who's just a little bitter that he has to call himself American McGee because Mister Stupendous AmazoMan was already taken by another kindergartner. But he seems to have beaten that. I once worked in a bad Mexican restaurant with three siblings named Rainbow, Eden, and Arrow Harvest, and try as they might, poor Rainbow, Eden, and Arrow could never get their names to conjure up anything beyond "Golly, your mom must've been stoned." American McGee has triumphed over that as well. Maybe he really is a superhero, a good-

looking maverick who plays fast and loose and by his own set of rules. Hell, yeah!

Frankly, I think we can all learn a little something here. Since American McGee doesn't actually have to create something for his name to make it hip and cool, I've found that I can live up my sorry excuse of a life by bolting "American McGee Presents" to it. *American McGee Presents My Microwaved Burrito!* Suddenly, that carne asada and bean lard tube is an edgy carne asada and bean lard tube. *American McGee Presents Falling Asleep in Front of the TV!* Never has gurgling up a puddle of drool on my sofa seemed so cutting edge. *American McGee Presents My Backed-Up Toilet!* It's not a plumbing problem—it's a watery portal to a topsy-turvy alternaworld where everything is seedy and sexy and every big-eyed digitized Suicide Girl wears painstakingly torn black fishnet stockings. Once you try the American way of life, there's no going back. Trust me.

Robert Coffey robert\_coffey@ziffdavis.com

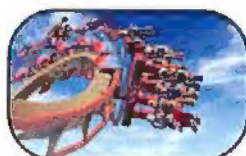




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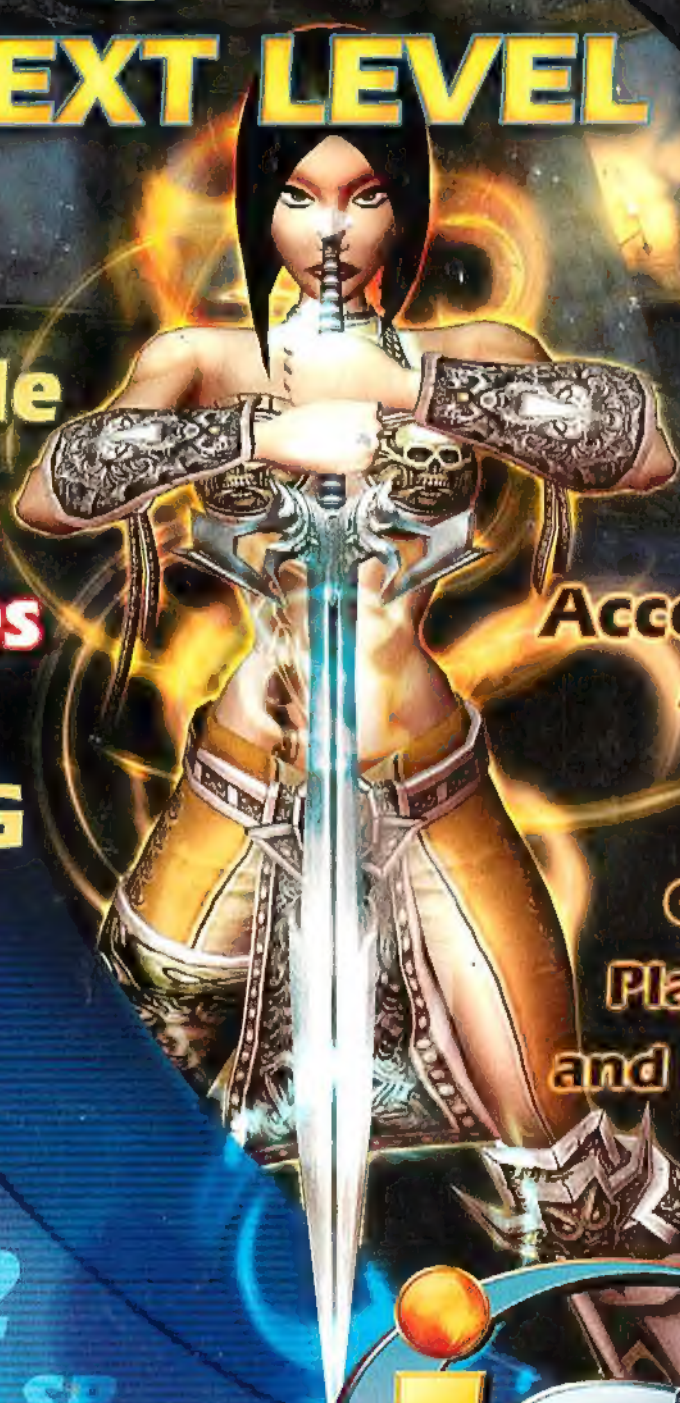


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